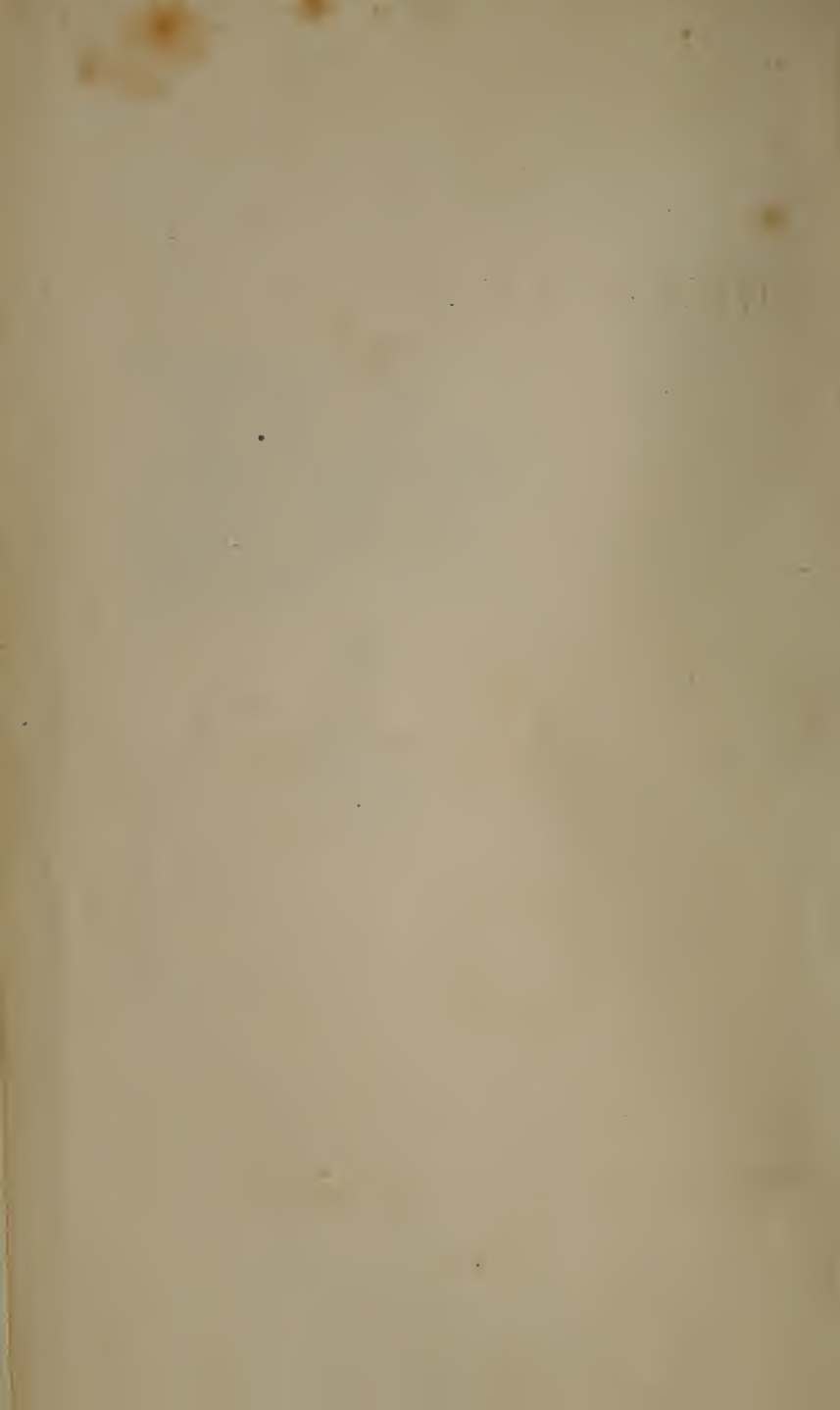




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THE
CREAM OF A LIFE

BY
A MAN OF THE WORLD

Sic veris falsa remiscet—HOR.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.



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THE CREAM OF A LIFE.



CHAPTER I.

WIESBADEN.

I HAVE said little about my sister-in-law, Mrs. Osmanby, since I related the events that led to her reunion with my brother. She is, however, well worthy of a greater space than the limits of this biography will allow of my bestowing on her. It might be supposed that the cloud which, during so many years, had darkened her existence, would have left but too conspicuous traces of its passage on her mind and character. Far from it. She seemed to have rallied from the effects of that long period of desertion and unmerited obloquy with extraordinary elasticity of spirits. Occasionally indeed, her face, still remarkably handsome, betrayed, in a certain care-worn

look, observable in her moments of silent thoughtfulness, the ravages of grief and anxiety. But, in general, her manner was bright and buoyant. I have seldom met with a merrier little woman, nor one more good-naturedly anxious to see all around her cheerful. Her devotion to her husband was as great,—as confiding, — as if no shadow of estrangement had ever crossed the path of their wedded life; and if, as might truly be said, there was a great arrear of conjugal happiness due to her, it was equally clear that the debt was in a satisfactory course of liquidation.

From the moment of her arrival in England, she had been welcomed by the family group at Osmanby in a manner to compensate, as far as possible, the neglect she had previously experienced. No blame could, indeed, fairly attach to my father and mother in reference to that long course of injustice for which George alone was answerable. But we all felt that signal atonement was due to one so deeply wronged; and no pains were spared, in the joint endeavours of the family, to promote her comfort and happiness.

My mother, from the first, received and treated her as a beloved daughter. My father's

unfailing kindness and gentle courtesy were equally conspicuous in his conduct and demeanour towards her; while his pecuniary liberality secured to George and herself the means of maintaining a handsome establishment in London.

Such was the charm of Mrs. Osmanby's manner, and so manifest her claim on the kindness of all George's relations, that she even contrived to find a soft corner in the not very sympathetic heart of my Aunt Tarleton. That austere matron had always, after a fashion, been fond of George. She had been the sole confidant of his afflictions during his short stay in London, on his first return from Canada. She had had the care of his infant child, whose premature death was perhaps a source of deeper grief to her than to himself; she had been his chief correspondent during the long years of his service in India; and, not having quite forgiven Maud for marrying an Irishman whose sister was abbess of a convent, she had apparently concentrated her chief family affections on George, as one in whom the signal failure of his matrimonial venture could not but develop the congenial spirit of uncompromising hostility to the Church of Rome and all its adherents. George's

unexpected reconciliation with his wife was, indeed, attended by circumstances ill suited to confirm this foregone conclusion. But happily, on this occasion, Lady Tarleton was more reasonable than consistent. The facts were such as to carry conviction to the most prejudiced mind. For once her womanly sympathies got the better of her theoretic want of charity. She could feel for the innocent and bereaved mother—she who had long watched by the bedside of that mother's dying child; and, in spite of the Council of Trent, she took Joséphine into favour, and indulged in pleasing speculations as to the possibility of her conversion.

But, if Mrs. Osmanby was on excellent terms with her husband's family in general, I think I was, from the first, the especial object of her kinswomanly regard. Although, as the reader has seen, I was really no more than a passive instrument or link in the chain of events which had led to her reconciliation with her husband, she always spoke as if that happy result had been mainly owing to my personal and spontaneous interference in her favour. She would persist in looking upon me as the chief vindicator of her fame, and the proximate cause of her present happiness.

Women, dear creatures ! are seldom very close reasoners in a syllogistic sense ; but, somehow or other, they have often a kind of logic of the heart, that answers their purpose satisfactorily, and does not lead them far astray in their practical conclusions. It was certainly true, that of all who greeted her entrance into the circle of our family affections, I was the one who, next to her husband, had most heartily rejoiced at her restoration to all she had so unjustly forfeited. Of this, I suppose, she had a sort of instinctive consciousness ; and naturally enough, perhaps, she confounded my sympathy with my services.

Her partiality for ‘le petit Gérard,’ as she affectionately but disrespectfully styled me, was an additional bond of union between my mother and herself ; and, although I had never entertained any suspicion on the subject, I had not been ten days absent from England, during the tour on which we were about to start, at the end of the preceding chapter, before I found that my sly sister-in-law was an active party to the domestic intrigue against my bachelor condition. She was, in fact, deeply implicated in the Great Grainger Conspiracy.

Our destination, in the first instance, was

Wiesbaden, whither we proceeded, through France, down the Moselle, to Coblenz, and thence by the Rhine to Biebrich ; the unsettled state of affairs in the Netherlands at that period rendering the route through Belgium to the Rhine inexpedient.

We arrived one evening at the Adler Hotel, Wiesbaden, too late for the *table d'hôte*, as we found, to our cost, in the make-shift character of our dinner. After making the best of our very indifferent *menu*, the deficiencies of which were to some extent atoned for by the merits of a bottle or two of excellent Apmanshauser, we had a long evening before us. Mrs. Os- manby, fatigued by her aquatic journey from Coblenz to Biebrich, or exhausted by her admiration for the beauties of the Rhine, which she had that day contemplated for the first time, went off to bed as soon as dinner was over ; the Colonel fell asleep on the sofa, over a number of the 'Times,' a week old ; I had got through my small travelling stock of modern literature ; and, though I had still the resource of that respectable *vade-mecum*, so strongly recommended to tourists by my friend Tom Moore—

A neat pocket Horace, by which folks are cozened
To think one knows Latin, when, may be, one does n't,

I was too familiar with the fancy, wit, and philosophy of that revered ancient to find, at the moment, a refuge in his pages from the gloom which oppressed my spirits.

Thus thrown on my own resources, I inquired of that important personage, the 'Herr Oberkellner,' whether there was anything going on at the 'Conversations' Haus' beyond the inevitable *roulette* and *rouge et noir*, which formed the ordinary and, to me, very uninviting pastime of the frequenters of that establishment.

I found it was the night of one of the balls which once a week superseded the worship of Fortune, or I might rather say Ruin, in the principal *salon* of the building. It was likely, he said, to be very well attended, as there were many strangers of rank at Wiesbaden, going through a regular course of the waters, the effect of which was supposed to be greatly assisted by the rapid exercise of the waltz and the galope.

In support of this statement, he brought me the 'Fremden-blatt,' or printed list of distinguished strangers then at Wiesbaden, in which, through a haze of black letter and experimental orthography, I thought I detected the

name of a London man or two of the right 'set.' Voting my own reflections very bad company, I caught at the prospect of finding somebody to talk to; and, although dressing was an effort, I got myself up in the neat-but-not-gaudy style appropriate to the occasion, and drove off to the rooms.

CHAPTER II.

CECILIA GRAINGER.

As I stepped from my *citadine* and landed under the colonnade, the strains of a favourite waltz, played as none but a German orchestra can play it, greeted my ears, carrying me back in imagination, first to Almack's, and next to Charles Street, Berkeley Square—the scene of my last and most momentous interview with Mary; and, as I passed into the ball-room, striving to take example by the pious Æneas, who,

Spem vultu simulat, premit alto corde dolorem,

I found myself in a brilliantly-lighted and gaily-dressed assembly, whirling away at a pace which the most active votary of the modern *deux temps* could not have stigmatised as slow, and at the same time doing what no *deux-temps* waltzer ever did or ever will achieve, viz., keeping good time with the music.

The room was rather crowded, and, as I stepped aside for a moment, to secure a free passage for a portly dowager, radiant with rouge and diamonds, I incautiously ventured within the range of the moving circle. Fortunately, I did not experience the disastrous fate of Monsieur Vieuxbois, so fearfully depicted in the well-known outline sketches of his eventful history; but a slight collision, which effectually checked the progress of a rapidly-passing couple, was the consequence. As I turned round, suppressing my feelings of agony, and masking my irritation at the descent of an armed heel on my favourite corn, under a semblance of contrite solicitude about the fair *valseuse* and her lace flounces, which I feared had sustained some damage, Cecilia Grainger stood revealed to my astonished gaze.

‘*Par exemple!*’ said she, after the first greetings, and the gracious acceptance of my apologies, ‘you are the very last person I looked to see here. I knew the Colonel and Mrs. Osmanby were expected, for mamma heard from the latter two days ago, announcing their approach, but not a word was said about your being of the party; at least, mamma never mentioned it to me.’

‘I was as little prepared for the pleasure of meeting you,’ said I; ‘for Joséphine has never dropped a hint on the subject.’

‘This is *impayable!*’ said she, while her eyes sparkled with fun; ‘and I must have some talk with you about it. But let us first get rid of my illustrious friend here; he doesn’t know a word of English.’

‘Prince,’ continued she, addressing in French her hulking partner, a hirsute Russian officer with the ribbon and star of St. George, ‘I must ask you to find me a seat. I am exhausted with fatigue. It is so rare a thing for me to waltz.’

So saying, she moved off with her obedient attendant into the adjoining room, which, exclusively of the occupants of a few whist-tables, thoroughly absorbed in the game, was nearly empty.

I followed pretty closely; not, as I thought, much to the satisfaction of the Russian, who looked over his shoulder at me with a glance rather more scrutinising than conciliatory. I believe I gave him a Roland for his Oliver. The poor man was evidently jealous; and, in promoting that state of things, I was, I fear, acting on the principle of the dog in the

manger. But I was not to be snuffed out by a black look; and, besides, the fellow had trodden on my corn.

Cecilia dropped into the first vacant seat, with a graceful performance of the 'bow dismissory.' The Calmuck lingered. 'Shall I not have the honour of re-conducting you to *Milady votre mère?*' said he.

'*Merci, non,*' said Cecilia. 'Mamma is wholly engrossed by her rubber; let me not detain you.'

The discomfited swain walked slowly away.

'Poor man!' said I, as I took my seat on the sofa by her side; 'he looks as if he could eat me without salt. Who is he?'

'He is an odious creature,' said the fair Cecilia; 'and I am so thankful that you have come to the rescue without knowing it. It is Prince Alexis Blominosoff. He is gambling away his patrimony—which is but small, for he is only a younger brother—at the horrid *rouge-et-noir* table, as fast as he can; and he is weak enough to fancy that my unfortunate consols are to set him on his legs again. He follows me like my shadow; and the impostor has even gone the length of attending mass at the Catholic chapel for the last two Sundays, by way of leading me to suppose that he is about to renounce the

Greek schism and be reconciled to the true Church.'

'Well,' said I, 'if, as we know, love once taught an English monarch to be wise, why should not

True gospel light first beam through Grainger's eyes, for the benefit of a Russian prince?'

'Because, as you well know,' rejoined she, 'the antagonistic radiance of a red nose is an obstacle to that species of conversion. I thought we had settled that you were not to talk gallant nonsense to me. It is on that understanding alone that I am treating you with the unceremonious familiarity of friendship. So you really did not know we were here?'

'I had not the slightest suspicion of it until I saw you. And yet I studied the *feuille des étrangers* with great assiduity to find out an acquaintance or two. I cannot think how your names escaped me, if they were in the list.'

'Oh ! there we are, to my certain knowledge ; but I am not surprised that you should have failed to discover us in our Teutonic garb. They have divided mamma into compartments, connected by a hyphen.

She figures in choice German characters as the "Gräfinn von Buol-Stroede," a tolerable disguise, you will admit, for a British peeress; while I can hardly expect my best friends to recognise me under the travelling title of "Fraulein von Gräniger."

'What's in a name?' said I. 'That which we call a rose, &c.'

'Upon my word, you are too bad. Your conversation reminds me on a small scale of "Elegant Extracts." We shall see how you will look to-morrow, when these barbarians begin to take unwarrantable liberties with your own patronymic. I fully expect that they will parade you as a Turkish *Illustration*, *Osman Bey*, by name.'

'I wish they would. You shall tell all your friends, in strict confidence, that I am the Aga of the Janissaries, or perhaps Sultan Mahmoud himself, travelling *incog.*, and I shall be all the rage in four-and-twenty hours.'

'Do not flatter yourself. It is not so easy to take the capital of little Nassau by storm. We have one or two crowned heads here already, Serene Highnesses by the dozen, and High Transparencies by the score; and as for Counts and Barons, *il en pleut*. I am not very

fond of all this lacquered splendour, which I distrust as Birmingham ware ; but poor mamma is in her element, and has a great weakness for high-sounding names. I was beginning to suspect that she had serious thoughts of buying a small sovereign prince by way of a husband for me ; but I now perceive that the old game is not yet played out. Do tell me how they have contrived to inveigle you hither ?’

‘ It did not require much ingenuity,’ said I. ‘ I have been ill, and in low spirits. Joséphine, who is, or fancies herself, rather out of health, was recommended by Sir Henry to try the waters here. She and George both urged me to accompany them on their trip, and as I wanted a change, and had nothing better to do, I consented.

‘ Exactly. *Vous vous êtes laissé faire*. See what it is to be artless and unsophisticated ! Did you really believe in Mrs. Osmanby’s dyspeptic symptoms ?’

‘ Why should I doubt their reality ?’ enquired I.

‘ They did not exhibit themselves, I suspect, until the gaieties of the coronation were over,’ said she.

‘I don’t know how that was. She was at the coronation, and so was I. But if she felt as ill there as I did, there is certainly no ground for accusing her of shamming.’

‘I suppose you were on duty with your battalion, and could not help yourself?’

‘That was undoubtedly the case. But I did not think you so *méchante*. Why may not poor Joséphine have her little ailments like any other fine lady; your mamma, for example?’

‘Oh! mamma’s internal disorganisation was clearly genuine, or you may be sure she would not have started for this place a month ago, leaving the coronation and all her glories as a peeress behind her. But Joséphine is a *petite rusée*. Why, when she was in correspondence with mamma, about joining us at Wiesbaden, has she thought it necessary to keep from you the fact of our being here?’

‘I cannot say, unless——’

‘Unless what? I will finish your sentence for you. Unless she thought as, perhaps, I do, that the knowledge of our presence here would have kept you away.’

‘If she thought so, she was simply mistaken, although I can account for the error into which

she has fallen. If *you* think so, I am at a loss to divine the grounds of your belief. I thought we had come to an understanding, and that it was a settled thing that we were to be friends. Your penetration has discovered what few but myself are aware of. Your frank kindness has, I may say, forestalled my confidence. I have been, and am still, very unhappy; and I feel very much disposed to look to you for sympathy. Why should I wish to avoid you?’

She looked up; and the tears stood in her eyes. ‘You have my sympathy,’ said she, with cordial earnestness of manner. ‘I did not and do not wish to surprise your confidence. But in whatever degree you extend it to me, it shall not be misplaced.’

As she spoke, so honest an expression shone in her eyes, and beamed over her usually sallow countenance, that, for the first time, I thought her almost pretty. The waters at Wiesbaden had, I suppose, done wonders; but the redness of her nose, to which she had lately alluded, was a thing of the past.

‘You are most kind,’ said I, ‘and it will be a great relief to me to tell you all that there is to be told. But I am not going to inflict my griefs upon you at a moment like this,

when you should be more agreeably employed than in listening to them. I observe that, in spite of the traditions of the "Sacré Cœur," you have overcome your anti-gyratory scruples. Shall we join these good people in the *galop*?'

'*Que voulez-vous? Il faut hurler avec les loups.* But I have no taste for emulating the exploits of the dancing dervishes, even under the auspices of *Osman Bey*. In accepting Prince Blominosoff as a partner for the waltz, I was merely making my election between Scylla and Charybdis. It was my only means of escape, at the moment, from a dreadful Scotch baronet, who infests us almost as perseveringly as the Russian.'

'You are quite right,' said I, 'to keep as clear as you can of Scotch baronets. There are a certain number of unquestioned patents on the list; but the majority are of as doubtful authenticity as the high-sounding titles of many of the foreign tigers around us.'

'Oh!' said Cecilia, laughing, 'my quarrel is with the individual, not with the species. I say nothing of Scotch baronets in the abstract, and cannot judge how far your heraldic scepticism is founded in truth or prejudice. But a bore is a bore, and Sir Kenneth M'Combie

would be intolerable, if he were Duke of Norfolk, or *Premier Baron Chrétien*. But there is mamma, squaring accounts with her select whist-party, and out of pocket, as usual, I have no doubt. It is a very fine thing, I dare say, to have Prince Gussiganda for a partner, with His Serene Highness the Margraf of Deuss-und-Doxis and the Feld-Maréchal Count Odtrichstein for your antagonists; but it is my private belief that these great people cheat a little at cards. Mamma used to hold her own very well in London; and it is not more than two months since I heard Lord Sefton himself say that she played a very good rubber. Here she is regularly victimized whenever she sits down to play. But don't tell her I said so.'

As Cecilia spoke, Lady Bulstrode rose from her card-table, and for the first time caught sight of me. Her exclamation of delight, as she came forward to greet me, was, I believe, sincere; but I more than doubted the genuine character of the surprise she expressed at seeing me. As well might the angler, who has been quietly and skilfully enticing the unconscious trout by the play of his line, affect astonishment at seeing him rise to the bait.

When ladies or gentlemen are playing a part

in society, they are very apt to over-act it. In particular, they are often unmindful of the salutary caution given by Captain Absolute, in the 'Rivals,' against superfluous mendacity. So it was with poor Lady Bulstrode.

'You have left all your friends well, I hope?' said she.

'My father and mother are at Osmanby. They were quite well when I last heard from them.'

'And the Colonel, and that dear Joséphine? They too, I suppose, are at Osmanby?' said her diplomatic ladyship.

'No; they are both at this moment safely housed, and, as I believe, fast asleep at the Adler, where we arrived this evening.'

'You don't say so!' exclaimed Lady Bulstrode. 'How charming! These unexpected meetings with friends, when one is abroad, are so pleasant! Have they brought the dear children with them?'

'Heaven forbid!' said I. 'If they had, you would not have seen *me* here.'

'What an ogre one would think you!' said Cecilia, 'if one didn't happen to know, as I do, that you are rather weak in your affection for those innocents.'

‘Of course,’ said I; ‘whenever they are paraded for my inspection in Harley Street, I am on my good behaviour, and so, I suppose, was the pattern wicked uncle of the “Babes in the Wood,” when he dined with their estimable parents.’

‘But I do n’t wish to make myself out worse than I am. I can be tolerant enough of infantine society, in small doses, and in localities where insubordination can be at once checked by summary banishment to a *squallery* out of earshot. But travelling seldom admits of such an amount of luxury in the quarter-master-general’s department, to say nothing of the details of the *roulage*. My fair nieces are far better disposed of blushing unseen, or roaring unheard, and “wasting their sweetness on the desert air” of the ancestral nursery at Osmanby, than serenading the water-nymphs of old Father Rhine, or “making night hideous” to the bilious denizens of the Adler or the Quatre Saisons.’

‘By-the-by,’ said Lady Bulstrode, ‘we are at the Quatre Saisons, where we shall be charmed to see you at any hour of the day; and if you will charitably afford your escort to Cissy and myself, in some of our drives

among the lions of the neighbourhood, you will be doing us real service. There are very few good English here, and we are rather overdone with "illustrious foreigners."

'Too happy to be of any use to you,' said I, 'and proud of the privilege of attending your ladyship and Miss Grainger on any occasion.'

'You see,' continued Lady Bulstrode, *redoublant de prévenances*, 'we are in a very forlorn condition, for My Lord could not accompany us when we started, on account of the coronation, and since then, he has been laid up with the gout in Berkeley Square, and consequently unable to join us, as he had promised. We must therefore appeal to your chivalrous feelings, to act, in some degree, as our gentleman in waiting.'

Cecilia gave me a look, the archness of which it is not easy to describe. 'I think, mamma,' said she, 'that you had better enlist Captain Osmanby as your partner in your next rubber with your friends the Margraf and the Feld-Maréchal. You will, I dare say, find him a more powerful ally than poor Prince Gussiganda, and I suspect you require his protection more in your evening whist than in your

morning drives. How many points have you lost to-night?’

‘Oh! never mind. The cards were very much against me.’

‘And the play would be still more against you, I fear, if your ladyship were so unlucky as to have me for a partner,’ said I.

‘Never fear,’ said Lady Bulstrode. ‘I shall not put you to the test, I seldom play, except on these ball nights, while Cissy is dancing; and I should expect you to revoke, if I took you away from the waltz. I make over all my right and interest in your services on these occasions to Cissy.’

‘I am her willing slave, at all times,’ said I, with a bow of deferential acquiescence.

‘No wonder mamma should occasionally lose the odd trick, when she is so careless in showing her cards,’ said Cecilia to me, significantly and confidentially, as I escorted her to the carriage on their return to the hotel.

CHAPTER III.

WIESBADEN—THE CHANCES OF THE TABLES.

AND thus it came to pass that, during my stay at Wiesbaden, I was frequently seen in attendance on Lady Bulstrode and her daughter. Everything tended to promote this result. The great intimacy between those ladies and my sister-in-law afforded Joséphine a reasonable pretext for seeking their society on every practicable occasion. In this respect, indeed, Lady Bulstrode and she played into each other's hands, by continually arranging excursions into the surrounding country, from which I could not escape without the risk of exhibiting a rather marked disinclination for their society; nor could I very well absent myself from the sociable meetings to which Lady Bulstrode frequently summoned us of an evening, in her handsome apartments at the Quatre Saisons, where tea was conducted on a great scale, and in a style of substantial

comfort that had irresistible charms for my brother, for whom that ceremony had the prescriptive dignity of a time-honoured institution. Lady Bulstrode, travelling as she did, *en grande dame*, with a small but highly effective retinue of English servants—and a *canteen* to match—was in a position to give this national institution a development which the Colonel had found unattainable at the Adler, even with the aid of an experienced courier and a French lady's maid, that formed the whole of our *cortège*.

George, too, liked an occasional rubber; and his wife, to promote his enjoyment, was always ready to take a hand, if necessary. Lady Bulstrode, bent on leaving Cecilia and me to our own devices, always took care to secure a fourth, in the person of Prince Gussiganda, Count Odtrichstein, or some other magnate from among the foreign visitors, so as to obviate the necessity of disturbing our *tête-à-tête*. Had she suspected the nature of our confidential talk, she would, perhaps, have been less solicitous on the subject. What could I do? I did not know half a dozen people at Wiesbaden out of our own small circle; nor was there anyone in the place whose acquaint-

ance I cared to make. The play-rooms had little attraction for one who never ventured his luck at games of chance, even at Crockford's, to which, like so many other London men, I belonged, *par an*, and where I could at any time, if so minded, see the process of ruin going on at a very exciting pace, not among foreign adventurers, but, alas! among fine young English gentlemen.

Every now and then, to be sure, the stakes at *rouge-et-noir*, risked by Prince Blominosoff, Baron Czinkoffsky, or the Marquis de Laffant-Faronade, were sufficiently high to rivet the attention of the most apathetic spectator on the pile of rouleaux, in their blueish-grey envelopes, which awaited the result of the mysterious and cabalistic deal of the presiding demon. But, in general, the '*facilis descensus Averni*,' of which the majority of the punters supplied the sad illustration, was down far too gentle a slope to afford the looker-on much excitement in watching the dreary operation, or counterbalance the disgust inseparable from the consciousness of being surrounded, if not jostled, on all sides, by blacklegs and demireps, all engrossed by the fascination of the meanest of vices in its most degrading form.

I may truly say that I have never had much taste for bad company of any sort. But when bad company is also dull company—wrong without being pleasant—I have always given it a very wide berth.

And so, as Cecilia said, ‘*Je me laissais faire.*’ Day after day I found myself doing the agreeable in rides, walks, or pic-nics—where, by accident or design on the part of the directing influences at play, she seemed to be somehow intrusted to my peculiar care and superintendence; while evening after evening found me turning over her leaves at the piano-forte, as she regaled the company with vocal efforts, in which, as I have already hinted, the execution fell rather short of the design; or, what I much preferred, chatting with her on the sofa, while mamma and my own special supervisors were engaged at cards.

On the ball nights, I was also on duty; and, lest she should be bored by the too persevering attentions of her foreign and British admirers, who mustered strong on these occasions, I was forced to dance with her myself, to an extent which, in a London ball-room, might have been thought ‘particular.’

But, dear reader! there was not the shadow

of a flirtation between us. Her wishes and aspirations, as she assured me, were all in the direction of a monastic life. My heart, as she well knew, was in safe keeping elsewhere; and her undisguised sympathy had soon led me to speak to her unreservedly of my hopes and fears with regard to Mary Conyers. Nothing cheered me so much as a long talk with her on the subject. She listened, with every appearance of the kindest interest, to the foolish details of feeling or fancy with which people in love are so ready to bore their patiently-enduring friends. She vehemently reproved my injustice, in attaching blame to Mary for a letter which my own rather mortifying silence had almost forced her to write. She combated my despondency, and strongly condemned my want of reliance on Mary's truth and depth of feeling, when I discussed the probability of her forgetting me, or transferring her affections to another. In short, she behaved to me like a kind and affectionate sister; and, by her lively conversation and judicious advice, did more to restore the tone of my spirits than all the attractions and novelties of the Duchy of Nassau, or all the wisdom of the most sententious philosophy could have effected without her assistance.

When a young gentleman is deeply and foolishly in love, he generally values the society of his friends in the precise ratio in which they are content to act the part of a mirror in reflecting his own lackadaisical or unreasonable feelings. It is, however, but justice to the fair Cecilia to say that, in addition to the claim she established on my regard by her skilful performance of this rather dreary office, she often effected a seasonable diversion of my gloomy or anxious thoughts by a lively charm of manner, an acuteness of observation, and a smartness of repartee, to which the most cynical and morose of egotists could hardly have been insensible.

‘I cannot understand,’ said I to her one evening, ‘how a person like you, with a keen sense of humour and a just appreciation of the jocose element in life, can be so bent on retiring from the world, and so ready to encounter the gloom of the cloister.’

‘Do you then suppose,’ asked she, in reply, ‘that everyone who can detect, and, to a certain extent, enjoy the quizzical points of human existence, is of necessity unmindful of its graver aspect, or the more awful responsibilities it involves?’

‘God forbid!’ said I. ‘Even in my small way, I humbly hope to get to heaven as a layman; but I cannot well fancy myself turning monk.’

‘Your vocation lies in another direction. You will, I hope, do your country good service as a soldier, and edify your generation by your public and private virtues. But spinsterhood—at least, to one circumstanced as I am, is no career. Although I like to laugh now and then at the world and its little eccentricities, I have no great taste for living in the midst of it.’

‘There is no reason why you should, if it bores you. But why remain a spinster, when you have so many opportunities of producing similar edification to that you require of me, by exhibiting yourself in the character of the pattern wife?’

‘I cannot submit to be married for my money.’

‘Are you, then, cynical enough to fancy that there are no men sufficiently disinterested to seek you for yourself?’

‘I don’t say it is impossible. But I can never be certain of the fact. Whenever I find myself inclining to that cheering view of the

question, I have recourse to a talisman which at once undeceives me.'

'What is that?'

'Cannot you guess?—my looking-glass!'

'You are libelling at once your own personal appearance and the common sense of mankind at large. Your theory appears to be, that no woman ever inspired a sincere attachment who was not a perfect beauty. This is equivalent to saying that all men are fools.'

'A good many of them are so, I suspect, where our sex are concerned; and I fear *we* cannot lay claim to a much higher rate of wisdom. But I am bringing no general charge against the hearts or intellects of you lords of the creation. I believe there are many ugly women; nay, if you insist upon it, women much plainer than myself, who are married for love; and, if I had not more than five or ten thousand pounds, I should, I have little doubt, be easily persuaded that all the *petits soins* lavished on me, and all the pretty things said to me by sentimental young gentlemen, were dictated by the most romantic attachment. But as it is, I cannot help distrusting the motives of everyone who favours me with his particular attentions. Instead of assuming,

in accordance with your suggestion, that all men are fools, I am much more disposed to acquiesce in King David's still more severe view of their character, which I cannot politely quote.'

'I am afraid you have rather misunderstood the Royal Prophet in supposing his severity to be directed against our sex alone. If you become a nun, as you threaten, you will of course study the Scriptures in the Vulgate; and you will then perceive that when David—or St. Jerome as his translator—says, '*Omnis homo mendax*,' he uses words quite extensive enough to include all the ladies in his sweeping condemnation. But here comes one who is a living and practical refutation of your man-hating hêresies. Who can impute interested motives to the attentions of such an ingenuous youth as Alexis Blominosoff?'

"Oh, the wretch!" exclaimed Cecilia. 'Pray make haste and ask me to waltz before he reaches us, or I shall be victimised. I can't bear telling white lies for the purpose of getting out of these small scrapes, and saying that I am engaged, when I am not.'

'With all my heart,' said I; '*Partons*.'

This little colloquy took place one ball-night

at the rooms, and as I whisked off the fair Cecilia to join the waltz, just at the moment when Blominosoff stalked up, I could see, by the scowl on his brow, that he was no less angry than disappointed.

The poor man had really some grounds for wishing me at the antipodes. It was my lot to officiate as his evil genius. Cecilia made no scruple of using me as a sort of outwork to check his siege operations. Lady Bulstrode, on the other hand, having no suspicion of the real footing on which her daughter and I stood with regard to each other, and probably desirous of bringing me to the point with all reasonable despatch, was apparently not unwilling to accelerate that event by 'playing off' the unconscious Alexis against me, and extending some show of encouragement to his persevering attentions to Cecilia, by way of alarming my jealousy, and arousing me from the too confident security to which she attributed the delay of my proposals. Thus it happened that the deluded Prince was sometimes allowed to be of our party, in the little country excursions which Lady Bulstrode so zealously promoted, or to share with Gussiganda, Odtrichstein, Czinkoffsky, and two or

three other *roués* sufficiently vouched for by the Almanach de Gotha, the honour of admission to the select evening circle at the Quatre Saisons.

But, however favoured he might seem to be by these profound tactics of her Ladyship's superfluous diplomacy, he could make no way with Cecilia, and it always appeared as if my presence was the chief obstacle in the way of his philandering projects. The result of all this was, that he looked upon me with an amount of jealous dislike of which he found it evidently very difficult to repress the outward manifestation; and although he contrived not to transgress the bounds of formal politeness in his behaviour towards me, when we were unavoidably brought into contact, I could easily see that he was ready to avail himself of the slightest opportunity that might offer, to break out into open hostility.

As I made every allowance for his misapprehension of Cecilia's feelings towards me, and had no particular reason for reciprocating his aversion, I was unwilling to indulge him by getting up a quarrel. While, therefore, I took no pains to conciliate him, and rather kept him at arm's length by a distant formality of demeanour, I studiously avoided giving him

any ostensible cause of offence; and, skin-deep as was our mutual civility, it might have lasted until the end of my stay at Wiesbaden, but for an outbreak of ill temper on his part, which, however absurd, I believe to have been wholly unpremeditated.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GAMBLING ROOM.

As I have already stated, the *salons de jeu* had but little attraction for me; and I was rarely seen at the Conversations Haus during gambling hours. But it happened that on the day after the ball, where Miss Grainger had, as usual, made use of me to ward off the attentions of her Russian admirer, I found myself under a sort of moral necessity to pay an evening visit to the rouge-et-noir table in the character of *cicerone*, as an act of charity to an old acquaintance who had arrived that morning at the Adler, and who was sadly in want of some *désœuvré* friend to do the honours of the place to him.

This was a Colonel O'Driscoll, whom I had met in Ireland at Shanbanagher Castle, the —th regiment, of which he was then in command, being at that time quartered in the neighbourhood.

He had since sold out, and, having the misfortune to be a bachelor, was making the most of his recent emancipation from military duties by a course of Continental travel, in which, I suspect, he found but scanty amusement, as his knowledge of French was on a very limited scale, his German at *zero*, and his preference for port and sherry far too decided to allow of his justly appreciating the merits of a *carte des vins* in which no drinkable specimens of either of those favourite beverages could reasonably be looked for.

He was a gallant old soldier, who had served with great distinction in the Peninsular War, and subsequently in India; and being an Irishman, *pur sang*, he cherished in theory and—*pro re natâ*—exemplified in practice the most orthodox national traditions as to drinking, fighting, and making love—pastimes in which the genuine Hibernian of the old school was generally very proud of his own proficiency, and very reluctant to admit the disqualifying influence of increasing years.

As the Colonel did not know a soul at Wiesbaden, it may well be supposed that on making his appearance, the morning after his arrival, in the Speise-Saal of the Adler, he

was delighted to recognise an acquaintance on whose civilities he had a reasonable claim; and I, on my part, was glad of the opportunity of reciprocating, to the extent of my very limited ability, the friendly attentions which I had received at his hands, when he presided over the hospitable and rather too convivial mess of His Majesty's —th Foot.

I accordingly did my best, by introducing him to my brother and Mrs. Osmanby, and placing myself at his service in the lionizing department for the greater part of the day.

The weather was beautiful; and there was that afternoon a kind of *fête-champêtre* given at Sonnenberg, by the Gräfinn von —, the wife of the Hof-Mareschal of his Serene Highness the 'Herzog.' This festivity, to which I was duly invited, but from which I absented myself, being glad enough of the excuse, in order that I might officiate as *valet-de-place* to my forlorn friend, had effectually cleared the gambling rooms of all the good company that was occasionally seen there in the day-time. The consequence was, that the play was on a very beggarly scale, and such as to occasion much disappointment to O'Driscoll, who, though no gambler himself,

had heard wondrous tales of the brisk rate at which people, at these lively establishments, travelled on the road to ruin; and was anxious to see a specimen of the pace. He was somewhat consoled, however, by the hope that the evening muster might be more in accordance with the statistical reports on which he had been relying.

In this expectation he was not deceived. When we entered the *rouge-et-noir* room towards nine o'clock, we found the game alive with a vengeance. The table was crowded with eager votaries of the goddess Chance. The punters included not a few of the most eminent names to be met with in the *Fremdem Blatt*, and among the most conspicuous was Prince Alexis Blominosoff, who, apparently flushed with wine, and in a highly excitable state of spirits, was playing with a reckless and seemingly successful pertinacity that was quite astounding.

As I entered the room and approached the table with my friend O'Driscoll, Blominosoff happened to look up from his game, and caught my eye. As a matter of course, I met his glance by a bow of recognition; and although we were not, as the reader has seen, on very cordial terms, I was surprised to see the look

of haughty defiance that accompanied the slight salutation by which he acknowledged my courtesy.

I should have been at no loss to account for this indication of ill-suppressed malevolence, had I been then aware of the fact, which came to my knowledge some twenty-four hours later, viz., that he had that afternoon taken advantage of my absence to pop the important question to the fair Cecilia, in the midst of the Fête at Sonnenberg, and had been met, as the reader may suppose, by a courteous but decided refusal.

It would seem, however, that for the moment he was successfully practising and illustrating the philosophy of Valère in Regnard's comedy of 'Le Joueur:'

Va va ! consolons nous, Hector, et quelque jour
Le jeu m'acquittera des pertes de l'amour.

A pile of rouleaux heaped up before him on his favourite colour and *carreau*, seemed, with very trifling fluctuations of luck, as he limited or increased the stake, to be gradually assuming most formidable dimensions, and clearly shadowing forth the breaking of the bank for that evening.

Suddenly, however, his luck appeared to

turn. In the flush of success, still betting on the same colour, he was induced to stake a large proportion, perhaps about a fourth of the amount represented by his pyramid of rouleaux. The sum named, to which, according to what appeared to be the rule of the table, he was entitled to restrict his stake, while leaving the entire pile on the compartment of the cloth which had been so favoured by Fortune, was '*dix mille francs.*' The tide ebbed; and ten of those neat little grey-coated and red sealed cylindrical packets were at once separated from his floating capital, and swept off remorselessly by the rake of the cadaverous looking croupier.

Still faithful to the colour which had previously done him such good service, he restricted his next *enjeu* to '*l'or au rouleau*;' and forthwith another of the grey-coated treasures was separated from its companions, and swept into the exchequer of the bank. With increasing caution he limited his next venture, still without changing the colour, to '*vingt-cinq louis*;' and thereupon, on the turning up of the decisive card, one of the rouleaux was opened by the croupier, and five-and-twenty gold pieces were poured out and raked away in the same direction.

Blominosoff's excitement increased. His knitted brow, flashing eyes, and fevered cheek betrayed the intensity of his vexation. He staked the remainder of the broken rouleau with a similar result; and then, as if in a fit of desperation, he swept the whole of his gambling capital, still exhibiting a goodly pile of rouleaux, upon the neighbouring square and opposite colour. I expected, of course, to hear him, as before, limit the amount of his stake, while the monotonous sound of '*Faites le jeu, messieurs,*' in its half-drowsy repetition by the jaded official, warned him that there was still time for caution. But no! the fatal announcement, '*Messieurs, le jeu est fait; rien ne va plus,*' was uttered, and the adventurous gambler was still silent. The deal began and went on. The final card was turned up, and in three seconds the whole of Blominosoff's large stake—from twenty to thirty rouleaux—was swept away.

Public attention had been for some time riveted on his game; and the 'fell swoop' of the croupier on his winnings, thus foolishly risked, had a startling effect on the mass of bystanders, who gave vent to their feelings in subdued exclamations of surprise, regret, or

disgust. I had been watching the game with considerable interest, and I had fancied that O'Driscoll was equally engrossed by this spectacle of reckless gambling ; but, just at the moment when the catastrophe occurred, he laid his hand on my arm to attract my notice, saying to me, in a stage whisper—

‘Osmanby ! D’ye see that squinting fellow with the rake ? Did ye ever see such a likeness to our dear friend, Lady ——, in Dublin, barring the rouge ? And then, again, that ould woman in the auburn wig and sham diamonds. Isn’t she the living image of ould King William in College Green ?’

Curiously enough, although it had not occurred to me before, the resemblance in both cases was so comically striking, that I could not help bursting into a fit of laughter, in which the Colonel heartily joined. The play being nearly brought to a close for the night, and my companion’s curiosity being satisfied for the occasion, I proposed a move homewards ; and we sauntered into the next room, on our way out, still laughing at the Dublin reminiscences so oddly conjured up. But before we had reached the outer door we were overtaken by Blominosoff, who, turning

suddenly round, accosted me in a tone of ill-suppressed rage, and with a voice trembling with excitement—

* ‘*Ah ça ! Messieurs,*’ said he, while his eyes flashed fire. ‘*Il me semble que vous vous égayez à mes dépens.*’

‘*Vous êtes dans l’erreur, Prince,*’ said I coldly. ‘*Qu’est-ce qui vous a mis cela dans la tête ?*’

‘*Vous avez beau dire, Monsieur. Vous avez éclaté de rire tantôt quand j’ai fait ce mauvais coup-là.*’

‘*C’est possible. Mais je vous jure qu’il n’était nullement question de vous ; ni de vos coups, bons ou mauvais.*’

‘*Monsieur, ces sont des défaites.*’

‘*Allons, donc, Prince, soyez raisonnable. Si la fortune vous a été contraire ce soir, j’en suis*

* ‘So! Gentlemen: you seem to be making merry at my expense.’

‘You are mistaken, Prince. What has put that into your head?’

‘It won’t do, Sir. You burst out laughing just now, when I made that unlucky venture.’

‘Very possibly. But I solemnly assure you that it had nothing whatever to do with you, nor with your ventures, lucky or unlucky.’

‘Sir, this is a subterfuge.’

‘Come, come, Prince. Be reasonable. If the luck

fâché pour vous. Ce n'est assurément pas cela qui m'a fait rire ; et je vous en donne ma parole d'honneur.'

'Votre parole d'honneur !' exclaimed he, repeating the words after me in a sneering tone.

'Oui, Prince ; ma parole d'honneur ; et je vous conseille en ami, de ne pas la révoquer en doute.'

'Vraiment ! Vous avez la bonté de me donner ce conseil-là.'

'Oui,' said I, now thoroughly nettled by his impertinence. *'Et songez à vous régler là-dessus, ou vous pourriez-vous en repentir. Ou diable ! voulez-vous, par exemple, que je voie le mot pour rire dans vos disgrâces aléatoires ! Vous vous trompez étrangement, si vous croyez être le premier imbécile que j'aie vu se ruiner au jeu.'*

has been against you to-night, I regret it, on your account. But it was assuredly not that which made me laugh — I give you my word of honour.'

'Your word of honour !'

'Yes, Prince ; my word of honour. And I advise you, as a friend, not to call it in question.'

'Indeed ! You are good enough to give me that piece of advice.'

'Yes ; and you had better make up your mind to follow it, or you may repent it. Why the deuce should

‘Comment diable ! vous osez me traiter d’imbécile ?’

‘Pärbleu ! je ne serais pas mal fondé à vous traiter d’enragé, puisque vous me cherchez quelque chose à propos de rien.’

‘C’est bon, Monsieur ! Vous aurez de mes nouvelles.’

‘Comme il vous plaira. Vous savez où l’on me trouve.’

‘What does all this mean?’ said O’Driscoll, as Blominosoff stalked away with a parting glance of defiant hatred. ‘I did n’t quite follow your conversation with that fellow. Did he give you the lie?’

‘Inferentially, at least, something very like it.’

‘Did he, by Jove ! I take it for granted you’re not the man to put up quietly with that.’

I see anything to laugh at in your gambling disasters ? You are egregiously mistaken if you fancy that you are the first fool I have seen ruining himself at play.’

‘What ! Do you dare to call me a fool ?’

‘Faith, I should be justified in calling you a madman, when you are trying to pick a quarrel with me about nothing at all.’

‘Very good, Sir ! You shall hear from me.’

‘As you please. You know where I am to be found.’

‘Of course not; and I suppose my mode of taking it has not been very submissive, since he has rushed away with the avowed intention of calling me out.’

‘The devil he has! What did you say to him?’

‘I gently insinuated that he was a fool and a madman; and on the strength of that too candid expression of opinion, he means to be beforehand with me in requiring satisfaction. It is a great bore, but there is no help for it; and I hope I may reckon on your friendship to see me shot or run through the body in legitimate fashion.’

‘My dear boy! I’ll be your second with all the pleasure in life, if it must come to that.’

‘Thank you, Colonel. It can’t be a very troublesome office under the circumstances. If the worst should come to the worst, as my brother is here, you’ll be relieved from all anxiety as to the expediency of having me pickled and sent home to my friends, as Sir Lucius has it.’

‘Oh! stuff and nonsense! I’ll see that you have the choice of the weapons; and I’ll engage you’re a better shot than he is, with the Mantons. These foreign fellows never understand

pistol-practice, though they're sometimes skilful enough with the small-sword.'

'Well,' said I, 'even at that game I might perhaps hold my own. I believe Angelo does n't consider me as quite his worst pupil.'

'Oh! we'll have nothing to say to the cheese-toaster. Hair triggers and twelve paces, that shall be our *ultimatum*. But in the meantime, if it's not inconvenient, I should very much like to know what it is you're going to fight about.'

I thereupon stated to the Colonel the particulars of the short colloquy that had taken place between Blominosoff and myself. He agreed, in conformity with precedents of the highest authority, that if my antagonist thought proper to require satisfaction for my discourteous estimate of his intellectual powers, I was bound to comply with his wishes; while, on the other hand, he was of opinion that the Prince's previous demeanour, which had been the means of betraying me into the exhibition of such unpalatable candour, would, in itself, have fully justified me in taking the initiative of hostile proceedings, had he afforded me the opportunity of doing so.

The reader, who has perhaps the advantage

of having been educated, or, at any rate, launched on the tide of social life, at a period when the ancient rules and maxims of the point of honour have become obsolete, must not be too severe on the moral cowardice which induced me to acquiesce in the view entertained of the matter by my friend the Colonel. No man had less taste for fighting, in the abstract, than I; although in any case where my duty as a soldier could require me to engage in the active conflict of war, I was fully prepared and should have eagerly striven to perform that duty with all the zeal and energy which the occasion might demand. I was, moreover, fully alive to the objections which, in a religious point of view, could be urged against the practice of duelling—a practice condemned and severely censured by the unanimous voice of Christian theology, no less than by those laws which derive their sanction from the temporal power of the state. But in those days the influence of long-established custom and the indulgent prejudices of society on this point were stronger than all laws, human and divine. The special legislation which brands with the character and involves in the penalties of felony all participation in even a bloodless

duel, had not as yet rendered the position of second in an 'affair of honour' one of such fearful personal responsibility as it is at the present day; and indeed it was not until some years had elapsed after the enactment in question, that the startling precedent of Lord Cardigan's case aroused the numerous class of punctilious and uncompromising 'friends' to a full sense of its practical operation.

The possibility of being 'called out,' or being under the painful necessity of 'calling out' some one else, upon very trivial provocation, and without the existence, on either side, of the slightest wish to shorten the days of the adversary whom one was in honour bound to meet in mortal conflict, was, therefore, at the period of which I am writing, a contingency ever present to the mind of the man of the world, and, in an especial manner, impressed on the belief of the officers of the army and navy. Nothing was plainer, in a Christian point of view, than the duty of eschewing such encounters. But alas! the alternative of social disgrace and ignominious dismissal from the service, was too formidable in its present effect on the destiny even of the scrupulous and sincere believer, to allow of his

acting up to those principles the full force of which he could not avoid admitting in theory. Let the present generation, who can and do take and inflict any amount of personal incivility, without risk of such unpleasant consequences, be grateful that they are spared all exposure to such fearful spiritual trials, and make allowance for the moral shortcomings of those who had not the Christian heroism to emerge triumphant from the ordeal.

The altered state of things to which I have alluded is doubtless among the most striking illustrations of that 'progress' of which, it seems to me, we hear rather too much from the self-sufficient philosophy of the day. But it sometimes occurs to me that the absence of 'personal responsibility' in the sense above referred to, has not acted very favourably in developing the amenities of life in the field of political or professional controversy—either on the hustings, in the senate, or at the bar. But let that pass.

Not feeling competent to display the requisite amount of 'muscular Christianity,' by declining the cartel of Prince Blominosoff on the high ground of religious duty, I made up my mind, as calmly as I could, to the prospect

of a hostile summons and its usual consequences; while my friend O'Driscoll, who lacked a little excitement, and experienced something of the feeling of his eminent compatriot who was conscious of growing 'blue-mouldy for want of a bating,' was, I suspect in a state of mind analogous to that of the enthusiastic surgeon who has the pleasing anticipation of performing a neat act of lithotomy, or operating on a very pretty case of cancer within the next four-and-twenty hours.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHALLENGE.

THE morrow came, and with it an emissary of the aggrieved Russian, in the person of that distinguished adherent of the exiled dynasty of France, Monsieur le Marquis de Laffant-Faronade.

This gentleman, on the authority of Heaven knows what social avouchments, enjoyed local and temporary rank at Wiesbaden, as a noble refugee from the Faubourg St. Germain—exiled from his native country by reason of his devoted fidelity to the elder branch of the Bourbons. He was the constant companion of Blominosoff, and, like the gallant Alexis, much engrossed by the attractions of the *rouge-et-noir* table. He was a tall, fine-looking fellow, with an enormous black *moustache*, which, with the addition of an imperial and whiskers of unusually large dimensions, went far to conceal as much of the ‘human face divine’ as the most

uncompromising beard of the present antitonsorial period of the Christian era. He had a kind of swaggering confidence of look and manner not unusual in the modern Frenchman, but, as it seemed to me, little in accordance with those graceful traditions of the *vieille cour*, which generally governed the demeanour of the high-born and exclusive clique whom he claimed to represent, and of whom I had had some experience from my boyhood upwards, in occasional visits to Paris, where my mother had many intimate friends among the *sommités* of the noble *faubourg*.

He was, however, on terms of apparent intimacy with Odtrichstein, Gussiganda, and other undeniable specimens of continental aristocracy, who graced the society without much improving the morals of the place; and on the few occasions when I had found myself in his company, I had felt bound to assume that the authenticity of his pretensions had been duly sifted, and that a certain something which I now and then detected in his pronunciation of French — and of which it may suffice to observe that it did not seem to me quite up to the mark of the Faubourg St. Germain, but rather suggestive of localities not even under

the dominion of France—was merely that slight remains of provincialism that cannot always be eradicated from the language of those who have passed their childhood on their family estates, in districts remote from the capital.

But whether his social claims were counterfeit or sterling, there was no uncertainty about his mission when his card was delivered to me in the public room of the Adler, with a request that I would favour him with an interview. It happened, conveniently enough, that the room was unoccupied at the moment, save by Colonel O'Driscoll and myself; and as, for various reasons, I wished to avoid an adjournment to the private apartments which I tenanted in common with my brother and Mrs. Osmanby, Monsieur le Marquis was at once admitted.

I had just time to apprise the Colonel, who was busy with an English newspaper in the recess of a window, that the expected *cartel* was in due course of delivery, when the bearer made his appearance. After a formal and rather ostentatiously courteous salutation, he entered at once *in medias res*, by observing that after the announcement that he had the

honour to wait upon me on the part of Prince Alexis Blominosoff, he presumed he need say no more in order to indicate the very painful object of his visit.

He addressed me in French, and I answered him in the same language.

‘ You are quite right, M. le Marquis,’ said I ; ‘ the prince, having grossly insulted me last night, without the shadow of a pretext, and failed to appreciate the forbearance that I exhibited in merely rebuking his folly, when I should have been justified in chastising his insolence on the spot, makes, I suppose, a virtue of necessity by demanding at my hands that satisfaction which, in strictness, *he* owes to *me*. As we are of the same mind, the details of the affair may be arranged without delay. I have only to refer you to my friend Colonel O’Driscoll, *qui voilà*, who will settle with you about time, place, and weapons.

The Marquis gave, I thought, a slight start on hearing the name; and O’Driscoll, being thus appealed to, left his seat near the window, and advanced towards us. As he approached, I was surprised to see him eyeing the Marquis with a look of the sternest scrutiny, which that gentleman met with unmistakeable signs of

confusion, the usual ruddy hue of his cheek giving place to an ashy paleness, while the Colonel, striding up to him, exclaimed—

‘Why!—what the d—l!—You infernal scamp! How dare you presume to show your face in the company of gentlemen?’

‘*Mille tonnerres!*’ said the Marquis, striving to brazen it out. ‘What d’ye mane?—that is, *qu’est-ce que ça veut dire, Colonel?*’

‘*Mille tonnerres*, indeed! you spalpeen! don’t be coming the French dodge over me. It wo n’t do. D’ye think I’ve forgotten your hang-dog face, or that, bad hand at French as I am myself, I can’t detect your d—d Mullingar brogue through all your *parlez-vous-ing!* Sure I’d know it, if ’twas Turkish you spoke!’

‘My dear Colonel,’ interposed I, ‘what is the meaning of all this? And why this fierce assault on M. le Marquis de Laffant-Faronade?’

‘Marquis!’ exclaimed the Colonel, ‘pretty Marquis, indeed! The fellow’s name is Miles Laffan, and he dare n’t deny it. He is the son of a County-Cork grazier. He was an ensign in the —th regiment in India, and was drummed out of the army—cashiered for cheating at cards—when I was quartered with our fel-

lows at Dinapore. Faith! I know all about it, and small blame to me, as I presided at the court-martial. *He* to come with a message from one gentleman to another! I'll expose him before the whole place, and have him whipped through the town at a cart's tail!

'Colonel, *au nom de Dieu!*—that is, for mercy's sake—don't split on me!' cried the crest-fallen aristocrat, dropping his foreign disguise, while the agitation of the moment brought out his County-Cork accent with all the racy fulness of its native melody. 'Ah, then, don't be too hard on an unfortunate fellow who was punished for what he never did, or, any way, never meant to do, being, as 't was well known, drunk as fiddlers—myself and the blackguard that accused me—when we sat down to play that unlucky game. Sure, I'll do anything in rayson you'd wish, even to making Blominosoff retract his challenge, and make an apology to the Captain; for he's not a bad fellow—Blowminosoff is n't—and I'll asy talk him over.'

'Hark ye, sir!' said O'Driscoll, 'if you don't evacuate the Duchy of Nassau within four-and-twenty hours, I'll denounce you to the police and the government as a swindling impostor, and enlighten them on the subject

of your biography. As to Prince Blominosoff, I give him the benefit of the doubt, which is more than he deserves, when I assume him to be ignorant of your character and history. But whatever communication may pass between him and my friend Captain Osmanby, it shall not be through *your* channel. Be off! and see that you obey my injunctions to the letter, by an immediate departure from this place, or, by the piper that played before Moses, I'll be as good as my word!

There was something in O'Driscoll's look and manner, as he uttered this warning in a loud voice, that seemed to have a marvellously persuasive effect on the Brummagem marquis. With a few deprecatory words he made a hasty retreat from the room, in a state of abject alarm that left no doubt on my mind of his speedy compliance with the Colonel's sharp marching orders.

'Pon my soul!' said O'Driscoll, as the door closed after him, 'this beats cock-fighting! That fellow was, out and out, the greatest blackguard in the division—let alone the cantonment. He'd fleece the whole regimental mess of his corps at *écarté* and *piquet*, and might have gone on doing so until his dying

day, if the woman who passed as his wife had n't, in a fit of jealousy, enlightened one or two of his brother-officers as to his skill in marking the cards and executing the *manœuvre* they call '*sauter la coupe*.' They had long wished to get rid of him, as he was more than suspected of personal cowardice, and was a notorious liar; but until his wonderful luck at cards had been so satisfactorily accounted for, they had no clear case for calling him over the coals. How the deuce has he contrived to get himself up so well as a French marquis? He must have had wonderful success in living on his wits for the last ten years.'

'But, Colonel,' said I, 'while you are chuckling over your luck and skill in unmasking an impostor, I must not forget that I have had a challenge from Blominosoff, and that it requires some notice beyond what our friend the Marquis is likely to report to him. I cannot afford to leave my character at the mercy of that scamp.'

'My dear boy! you are perfectly right; and, as you justly observe, although we have *un-marquised* Mr. Laffan, that is no reason why you should be balked of your duel with the Prince.'

‘No such luck, I am afraid!’ said I, laughing. Blominosoff may, for aught I know, be as great a *vaurien* as his ambassador; but there is no mistake about his social position, and if he is bent on risking his worthless life in so rubbishy a quarrel, I am bound, of course, to imperil my valuable existence for his satisfaction. The first thing to be done, however, is to let him know that we decline to be shot in such very disreputable company. I’ll just scribble off the kind of letter that occurs to me as appropriate, and, if you approve it, will despatch it at once.’

I sat down to write accordingly. My note was as follows:—

‘Le Capitaine Osmanby a l’honneur d’avertir M. le Prince de Blominosoff qu’un officier de la Garde Anglaise ne saurait recevoir un cartel qui lui arrive par les mains d’un vil aventurier. Si le petit différend d’hier au soir doit s’ajuster par la voie des armes—projet auquel M. Osmanby ne s’oppose nullement—M. de Blominosoff est invité à se munir d’un témoin plus digne du commerce des honnêtes gens que le soi-disant Marquis de Laffant-Faronade.’

‘Will this do, Colonel?’ said I.

O'Driscoll tried to spell it out with the aid of his double glasses.

‘My dear fellow,’ said he ‘you write such very illegible French, that I have some trouble in deciphering it. Just give me the sense in English.’

For the benefit of any reader whose spectacles may not be of the right focus for foreign languages, I translate, as I did for the Colonel.

‘Captain Osmanby has the honour to inform Prince Blominosoff that an officer of the English Guards cannot receive a challenge delivered by the hands of a low adventurer. If the slight misunderstanding of last night is to be arranged by an appeal to arms—a proceeding to which Captain Osmanby has not the slightest objection—Prince Blominosoff is requested to select for the office of second some person fitter for the society of gentlemen than the self-styled Marquis de Laffant-Faronade.’

‘Very good!’ said the Colonel. ‘Now that’s what I call neat and appropriate; cool as a cucumber. Saying all that’s necessary, without a word thrown away. You write like a practised hand in these matters. There’s some satisfaction in going out with a man who

understands the thing, and is neither in a rage nor a flurry.'

'I hope,' said I, 'that there's a good deal more satisfaction in going home with him if he is so lucky as to return in a whole skin. In the mean time, I feel a melancholy gratification at the approval of your mature judgment. I hope I may be as cool when we arrive on the ground; or at least, that if I am in a blue funk, I may have the skill to conceal it.'

'You've just hit it,' said my experienced friend. 'Depend on it, that's the secret of true heroism. I've been under fire a good deal in my time, and contrived, oddly enough, to persuade the people about me, and after them the Horse Guards, that I rather liked it. But I can't say I ever much enjoyed it at the time; at least, for the first half hour or so. You'll be all right; I have no fear for your nerves.'

'I hope not,' said I. 'But as you have had so much practice, perhaps you can give me a hint as to what is best to steady them on these pleasant occasions.'

'Faith!' said the Colonel. 'It's hard to tell. If I must give an opinion, I should say a bottle or two of good old port over-night.'

The letter was duly sent, but we were ill-

prepared for the sequel. In the course of the day, a formidable-looking despatch with a seal nearly as large as a five-franc piece, on which were displayed heraldic glories of the most imposing character, surmounted by something very like the Imperial crown of the United Kingdom, was put into my hands. In the midst of the little excitement of the moment, I could not help pausing to notice the appropriate character of the supporters upholding the Blominosoff escutcheon—they were a couple of DONKEYS!

The letter was (done into English) as follows:—

‘It is with the deepest regret that Prince Alexis Blominosoff has to announce the painful necessity under which he finds himself of postponing to an indefinite period the adjustment of his slight difference with Captain Osmanby, the receipt of whose letter he begs to acknowledge.

‘An unexpected and peremptory summons from his Imperial master has rendered his instant return to St. Petersburg a matter of indispensable obedience. Whatever may have passed in the heat of the moment last night between them, M. de Blominosoff is convinced

that Captain Osmanby is *trop galant homme* to misinterpret a step dictated by an imperious necessity. If their position, as adversaries, remains unchanged, M. de B. feels a just confidence that their sentiments of mutual esteem are equally unaltered, and with that conviction requests Captain Osmanby to accept the assurance of his high consideration.'

'Here's a disappointment!' exclaimed I, as, having sought out the Colonel, I handed him the not unwelcome letter to read. 'How shall I get over it! How contrive to bring down my ferocious feelings to the calm level of peaceable society! Instead of a bottle of port, I shall have to take a few grains of calomel.'

'What's the use of showing me *them* hieroglyphics?' said the Colonel. 'And what d'ye mean by disappointment? Has the fellow shirked?'

'Oh dear no! It's only a pleasure deferred, he says. But in the mean time he's off. He shall speak for himself, however; and thereupon I interpreted this singular document.'

'Well!' said O'Driscoll. 'I've seen an affair or two of this kind take an odd turn. But this beats everything I have met with in that line.'

The fellow must be an idiot as well as a poltroon. Imperial master!—indispensable obedience—forsooth! None but very young birds are to be caught by such chaff as that. I suppose his principedom is about of a piece with the other fellow's marquisate.'

'No,' said I, 'Blominosoff's rank, such as it is, although of little practical importance in the eyes of those who understand the difference between a British peerage, and the majority of high-sounding foreign titles, is no imposture. He is, as I am assured by Odtrichstein, who has the pedigree of all the great continental houses at his fingers' ends, and figures himself in the *Almanach de Gotha*, a genuine Blominosoff, and brother to the present head of the family. I do not suspect him of personal cowardice; and I think I have a clue to his reason for wishing to pick a quarrel with me. His sudden departure, therefore, whatever may be the secret of it, has, I am convinced, nothing to do with any disinclination on his part to meet me at twelve paces. It is my private belief that he would have very great satisfaction in letting in the daylight through me, and had been for some time looking out for a favourable opportunity of doing so.'

‘How then do you account for his bolting at this particular time?’

‘I can’t very well account for it. But I am inclined to suspect that he is merely passive on the occasion. I surmise that this fellow Laffan has some secret hold over him, and that he is putting on the screw at the present moment. From all I have heard, I am convinced that Blominosoff has lost enormous sums of money during his stay here. He was said to be ruined, or nearly so, a month or six weeks back, as Odtrichstein tells me; and he was, I am told, comparatively shy of the tables until the arrival of the Marquis, about three weeks ago, since which time he has been again playing very high, and occasionally with very great success. Many trifling occurrences — which I now call to mind, though I took no particular notice of them at the time—convince me that this adventurer was indebted to Blominosoff for an introduction to the dons here, who no doubt have taken his alleged position on trust, when vouched for by one of their own set. Rely upon it, our friend from Mullingar has got the gallant Alexis into his power by lending him money—perhaps at usurious interest, taking

out payment in kind all the time by coercing the poor wretch to indorse his Brunnagem pretensions as a French aristocrat. And as our Hibernian Mephistophiles has been constrained, thanks to your sharp eyes and retentive memory, to make his exit to the tune of "We fly by Night," I have not the least doubt that for his own purposes he is forcing the unhappy Faust to bestride the broomstick behind him.'

The result proved the accuracy of my conjectures, though it was not until a year later, and consequently long after my return to England, that I arrived at their full verification, when, on mentioning Blominosoff's name in conversation with an *attaché* of the Russian embassy, who was an acquaintance of mine, I learned that the social career of these two enterprising spirits had been brought to a premature close. An extensive swindling transaction, in which they were jointly engaged, having led to their arrest at Naples, Blominosoff committed suicide in prison, thereby escaping the fate of his confederate, who, after a lengthened trial, was condemned to the galleys for life.

CHAPTER VI.

A TIMELY RETREAT.

THE sudden and simultaneous disappearance from the social firmament of two such shining lights as Prince Alexis Blominosoff and the Marquis de Laffant-Faronade could not fail to produce a considerable sensation among the select coteries of Wiesbaden. Accordingly, on the day after their departure, conjecture was rife throughout the length and breadth of that miniature capital, as to the cause and attendant circumstances of this precipitate movement.

I was not very anxious to enlighten that inquisitive and indiscreet abstraction, the public, on the subject of my connection with the occurrence that excited so much curiosity. But if the hundred tongues of rumour find ample employment in the dissemination of '*canards*' in localities where the time and attention of the great majority are engrossed by the serious business of life, it is natural

that they should exhibit a far greater amount of volubility and more striking powers of invention in the midst of a small community, whose only occupation it is to get daily through the four-and-twenty hours at as slight an expense of physical and mental exertion as possible. It was, therefore, no surprise to me to find my quarrel with the unlucky Prince, in substance, a matter of notoriety, and in detail and accessories a subject of ingenious fiction among the native and foreign gossips of the *desœuvré* little watering-place.

As I had never been known to stake a single florin on the chances of the tables, the aforesaid Dame Rumour had no pretext for ascribing the dispute to any misunderstanding connected with the game. The obvious alternative, that 'there was a lady in the case,' was of course inevitable. Strictly speaking, this was not very wide of the mark. But, strange to say, the quidnuncs of the place, little conversant with the mysteries of Lady Bulstrode's rather exclusive circle, thought proper to select, as the supposed cause of our rivalry and deadly feud, a certain Madame Pultowska—a very showy and highly rouged individual of doubtful antecedents, and still more doubtful pro-

priety of demeanour, whose good understanding with the noble Alexis had been no secret from the period of his arrival at Wiesbaden, but with whom, I am happy to say, I had not even the honour of a bowing acquaintance.

We had, it seems—so said rumour—fought it out at an early hour of the morning that succeeded the quarrel. Blominosoff had been attended by his *fidus Achates*—the Marquis de Laffant-Faronade—and I by the distinguished-looking stranger, name unknown, or at least not accurately ascertainable from the *Fremdenblatt*, who had been seen in my company at the rooms on the previous night. We had fought with small swords; I had, in two or three passes, disarmed the Prince, and, at the point of the sword, had exacted a promise of his immediate departure from Wiesbaden, as the price of my forbearance in not running him, then and there, through the body.

Rumour was rather at fault in fixing the exact *locus in quo* of this terrific combat, but the substantial accuracy of the main facts was vouched for by the *bourgeoise* of the *hôtel garni*, in which M. de Laffant was a lodger, on the authority of that eminent person himself, who had confided them, as a profound

secret, to her sympathetic ear, by way of accounting for his sudden departure, rendered imperative on him, as he assured her, by that of his beloved friend, whom he could not bear to lose sight of at so painful and mortifying a crisis.

As the details of an affair of honour *man-quée* did not seem to me matter of edifying discussion in a circle of ladies, I had determined that I would keep my own counsel with regard to what had occurred between Blominosoff and myself, not even making a confidant of my brother on the occasion, being perfectly well aware, as a matter of theory, of a fact that in my own person I have since realised in practice, viz., that a good husband does not find it easy to keep a secret from his wife. But when, after being absent the whole of the day and the greater part of the evening, on a country excursion with O'Driscoll, I looked in, at about half-past nine, at Lady Bulstrode's, at the Quatre Saisons, where my brother and sister-in-law were engaged in a quiet rubber with her ladyship and Cecilia, I was surprised to find the whole party fully apprised of the fact that Blominosoff and Laffant-Faronade had started that afternoon

for Frankfort, and much puzzled by vague reports connecting my name with the cause of their abrupt departure.

If it was quite clear that I had nothing to boast of, I had as certainly nothing to be ashamed of in my share of the recent quarrel between Blominosoff and myself. I therefore did not hesitate to set at rest the conjectures of my friends by relating the circumstances precisely as they had occurred; not attempting to conceal my suspicion that the Prince was, in some way or other, in the power of the impudent impostor whom O'Driscoll had so fortunately recognised. It had not struck me that there was anything particularly exciting in this narrative; and yet I observed that, as it proceeded, Cecilia was visibly agitated, and had much difficulty in restraining her tears. This did not escape the notice of her anxious mother; and that discreet lady, with true diplomatic instinct, wisely decided that it would be less embarrassing to offer some explanation than to affect ignorance of her daughter's excited feelings.

'It is no wonder,' said Lady Bulstrode, with a glance of affectionate sympathy towards Miss Grainger, 'that poor Cissy should

feel a little unnerved at hearing all this, when she reflects on what an escape she has had ; for I may now tell you, Captain Osmanby, what you have probably not yet heard, that this wretched man, Prince Blominosoff, actually made her an offer of marriage at the Sonnenberg fête yesterday (where, by the bye, you ought to have been). I need not tell you, I fancy, that it was politely declined. But just think how it might have been,' continued her ladyship, still adroitly seeking to cover Cecilia's confusion, 'if Cissy had really liked the man, as she would have been very pardonable for doing. He is certainly gentlemanlike and agreeable. *I* think him decidedly handsome ; but that is mere matter of taste. Count Odtrichstein assures me that his family is one of the highest rank and consideration at the Court of St. Petersburg, and that he is nearly related to more than one sovereign house in Germany. With all this, he might well expect to find favour in the eyes of a young lady of even Cecilia's standing in society. And yet it turns out that he is little better than a gambling adventurer ! It is really awful !'

By dint of this judicious prosing, Lady Bul-

strode gave Cecilia time to recover her usual serene composure of demeanour.

‘At all events, mamma,’ said she, with a faint smile, and an attempt at sprightliness of tone, ‘I have not been in any danger. My greatest enemy cannot accuse me of giving the horrid man any encouragement. I appeal to Captain Osmanby himself on the point.’

‘I hope, my dear Miss Grainger,’ said I, ‘that I am not your greatest enemy.’

‘How do I know that?’ retorted she, with her *air espiègle*, ‘when you are so eager to shoot my most devoted admirer?’

‘You wrong me,’ said I. ‘I have never harboured the slightest project of *suicide*!’

‘*Bravo! mon petit Gérard,*’ exclaimed Joséphine; and a general burst of laughter did credit to my ready gallantry and — hypocrisy.

It happened, a day or two after, that I found myself among the evening promenaders in the gardens behind the Conversations-Haus, to which also the fineness of the weather and the performance of an excellent brass band had attracted Lady Bulstrode and her party, including, of course, George and his wife.

In our walking excursions, the three conspirators, as Cecilia jocularly termed them, were always ready to afford us every reasonable opportunity for a *tête-à-tête*, by lagging behind or hurrying on, as the case might be, when a little skilful but unobtrusive marshalling had succeeded in placing us together, in advance or in the rear of the party.

The presence of O'Driscoll, in addition to Gussiganda and Odtrichstein, as one of her ladyship's suite in attendance, supplied unusual facilities for this object on the occasion in question: for, with true Hibernian devotion to a pretty face, the Colonel was irresistibly attracted to Mrs. Osmanby, and dangled perseveringly at her side as she walked leaning on her husband's arm; while poor old gouty Gussiganda, and the gallant Feld-Marschall — an elderly military dandy, padded and braced in within an inch of his life, and suffering visible martyrdom to his corns in a pair of absurdly tight boots — mounted guard on either side of the portly English countess, and with difficulty kept up even the moderate pace at which her rather excessive *embonpoint* made it convenient for her to proceed.

Quite naturally, therefore, Cecilia dropped

behind with me as soon as I had joined the party. Indeed she seemed to execute the manœuvre in a very decided way, so as to leave me but little option in the matter. Nevertheless, she was unusually silent, as we made one or two turns of the *allée*, not originating any remark, and scarcely replying by more than monosyllables of assent to my acute and highly epigrammatic comments on the company in general and a few exceptional tigers in particular.

At length, after humouring her taciturnity for a few minutes, during which we walked side by side, without a word passing between us, I thought myself entitled to ask for an explanation of so unusual a state of things.

‘*Vous êtes rêveuse ce soir*, lady fair,’ said I. ‘Is there anything the matter?’

She had been walking for some time in apparently deep contemplation of the path over which we were journeying. On being thus questioned, she raised her eyes from the ground, and looked up at me with her usual frank and friendly glance.

‘Well, yes!’ said she. ‘I rather think there is; that is—I am inclined to be dissatisfied with myself—and—’

‘Not with me, I hope,’ I interposed, as she left her sentence unfinished.

‘No, not exactly; but I am not sure that if you fell into my train of thought, you might not discover similar grounds of self-condemnation, although in a minor degree.’

‘This is very mysterious,’ said I; ‘and, although we are at the end of September, the weather is really too hot for the violent exertion of one’s powers of conjecture. So, perhaps, you will explain.’

‘I was not aware,’ retorted she, ‘that the duty of self-examination was affected by the state of the thermometer. But *trève de persiflage*! I am speaking in sober seriousness—in sober sadness, I may almost say—and I know that with all your pleasant levity, or, I should rather say, liveliness of manner, you can be serious when the occasion requires it.’

‘There is no doubt of that,’ said I, with a sigh. ‘The levity you speak of is often nothing more than a desperate effort to struggle against feelings of depression for which I have but too just cause. Pray let me know the meaning of all this.’

‘Will you promise not to be offended, and,

above all, not to misinterpret what I am about to say ?’

‘I can safely pledge myself not to take offence ; for I am satisfied you can have no other than a kind motive in the observations, whatever they may be, that you think it right to make. It is, I hope, superfluous to assure you that I shall not, wilfully or knowingly, misinterpret your meaning. Once more, let me entreat you to explain yourself.

‘I have been thinking,’ said she, after a pause, ‘that you and I are not acting quite fairly by those around us.’

‘How so?’ enquired I, rather mystified. ‘I am not conscious of any double dealing.’

‘Not exactly that, perhaps,’ said she. ‘But I thought you would have understood what I mean. You are well aware of the hopes and projects that are entertained by mamma, and fully shared by your own relatives; and you know—we both know that—that they are under a delusion with regard to us.’

‘If you mean,’ said I, ‘that our friendship, which we have not sought to disguise, may be mistaken by them for a more tender feeling, I cannot deny the possibility of their drawing such an inference. I can only say that I have

acted naturally, and, I hope, frankly in the matter. I came to Wiesbaden without the slightest idea of meeting you ; and, as you well know, much preoccupied with other thoughts and feelings. By what I have heard from yourself, I have been led to suspect that there was some preconcerted arrangement in the affair, as far as Lady Bulstrode and Joséphine are concerned. But not a word has dropped from my sister-in-law, which would justify me in assuming that I was the object, or one of the objects, of the manœuvre. No doubt I was glad to meet you ; and in your kind sympathy for my perplexities, the confidence of which I did not wholly volunteer, you have seemed to be equally well pleased that the chances of this idle little spot should occasionally bring us together.'

' I am far from denying it,' said Cecilia.

' If I have appeared to be in very close attendance,' continued I, ' I have been making myself, as I thought, honestly useful, in compliance with your wishes, expressed or implied, that I would act as a shield to guard you from the importunities of British bores or foreign adventurers. I have rescued you now and then from the infliction of your tiresome

Scotch baronet, and from the half-tipsy assiduities of that choice specimen of Hibernian aristocracy, Lord Mount Mellick ;—I have kept Czinkoffsky at bay ; and if I have not been wholly successful in warding off Blominosof, he, at least, has given me full credit for my good intentions in the matter.'

'Do not speak of it !' said Cecilia, with a slight return of the agitation I had noticed on the former evening. 'It is dreadful to think of—and—and I can scarcely forgive myself for having been the occasion of betraying you, or all but betraying you, into so great a sin as fighting a duel.'

'I am very thankful to have escaped it,' said I. 'But what I mean to say is that, on the strength of the good understanding between us, I have, in all sincerity and good faith, acted the part your friendship assigned me. This is the very head and front of my offending.'

'It is quite true. But I was thinking of mamma, and how all this must have appeared in her eyes.'

'I may possibly,' observed I, 'have reminded Lady Bulstrode of the dog in the manger. But I do not see that it was incum-

bent on me to undeceive her. I considered myself answerable to you alone.'

'But with me,' said Cecilia, 'The case is different; and I cannot help feeling that I have, in a manner, allowed her to deceive herself, when she had a right to more candid dealing on my part. I fear she has arrived at a conclusion which will eventually involve a severe disappointment to her.'

'Why leave her any longer in error?' said I.

'It is not my intention to do so. But there are difficulties, or, at least, there is some awkwardness in a sudden explanation on the point. You can assist in preparing the way for this.'

'What would you have me do?' enquired I, with some astonishment.

'You have promised not to be offended at anything I say to you,' said she, hesitatingly.

'I have pledged my word to you. I feel truly grateful for your sympathy, which has greatly cheered me since I arrived here. Believe me, there is nothing in my power that I would not willingly undertake to contribute to your happiness or comfort.'

'I feel quite sure of it,' said Cecilia, with visible agitation; 'and yet—'

‘Well,’ said I; ‘again, what is it you require of me?’

A pause of half a minute: at length the words came.

‘I think it would be as well,—if you were to leave Wiesbaden.’

‘Really!’ said I, rather perplexed. ‘Well —if you wish it—I am ready to start to-morrow morning, and, like Sir Peter Teazle, leave my character behind me.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Cecilia. ‘This is exactly what I feared. I see you are offended.’

‘No!’ said I, ‘not in the slightest degree. But, of course, I am prepared for the inferences that will be drawn from my abrupt departure—the necessity of which I cannot exactly understand. You evidently think that from circumstances, of which I may at least say that I am not solely answerable for them, your mamma, and perhaps others, will conclude that I have been trifling with your affections in a most heartless way. I cannot divine why you should leave her, even for a day, under such a delusion; and I can only hope that, in justice to me, you will take measures to remove it from her mind, at the earliest moment that you may deem it prudent or convenient

to do so. Why this should not be done without calling into activity, in the first instance, the conjectures that cannot fail to be excited by my sudden and unexplained disappearance, is a mystery to me. But I have promised unquestioning obedience to your wishes—and I will keep my word.'

She walked on in silence for a minute or two, struggling to repress the tears that, in spite of all her efforts, began to flow.

'I own,' said she, at length, 'that my request must appear very singular. You are very good and kind; and I cannot help feeling that you have a right to more perfect candour at my hands. Perhaps it is not on mamma's account alone, that I urge the expediency of your departure. I ask it for my own sake.'

'For *your* sake,' exclaimed I, half bewildered.

'You have pledged yourself,' she continued eagerly; 'and I entreat, I implore you not to misinterpret my meaning. You know the interest I have taken—that I still take—in the result of your attachment to Miss Conyers. It is my fervent hope that I may be able soon to congratulate you on the removal of every obstacle to your happiness. But, bent as I am

on retiring from the world,—and bound as I am, in that view, to keep a due control over my mind and feelings, I cannot help fearing—you will not misunderstand me—that your society, agreeable as I acknowledge it to have been, has tended to divert my thoughts, in some degree, from their proper channel, and proved that the world has not so completely lost its hold on me, as I had imagined. It is, perhaps, a scruple—I hope so; but the events of the last few days have affected me more than is—*is* reasonable or justifiable. I have been deeply moved by the thought that you have been on the point of imperilling your life—perhaps your soul—through my means; and, much as I value your friendship, I must, as one devoted to higher objects, guard against an undue indulgence even in that allowable feeling. I know you will understand and honestly appreciate my idea.'

'Dear friend!' said I, 'rely upon it that I am incapable of putting any construction on your words but such as ascribes them to the highest delicacy of mind and generosity of feeling. I am bound to respect your scruples, how slight soever I may deem their foundation in the reality of things. I shall, without

further remonstrance, act at once on your suggestion, and start for England to-morrow. If in leaving you—which, I need not say, I shall do with regret—I can indulge a hope that, as you intimate, my society, empty and frivolous as I fear it has too often been, has done something towards re-animating your interest in a world which, with all its faults, contains many a true heart and upright spirit not uncongenial with your own, I shall consider it a fortunate circumstance. In the meantime, I leave in your hands the mode of explanation and the amount of confidence which you may think proper to bestow on Lady Bulstrode, in reference to my departure and its causes; with the reservation that, if you think it expedient to state—which you are at liberty to do—that you have long known my affections to be engaged, and that our alliance has been founded on that understanding, you will not mention the name of Mary Conyers in connection with that statement.'

'I need not assure you of my discretion on that point,' said Cecilia; 'and I know you will give me credit for feeling all I ought to feel in reference to the true proof of friendship you are giving me by sacrificing your own

arrangements and the society of your relations in order to relieve me from real or imaginary difficulties. How shall you account to your brother and Mrs. Osmanby for your change of plans ?'

'Not, certainly, by enlightening them on the subject of this conversation, which I shall look upon as strictly confidential. Should they infer, as they possibly may, that I have made you an offer of marriage and been rejected, they are quite at liberty to do so. Neither my reputation for good taste, nor your character for good sense, can possibly suffer on the occasion.'

'Oh, Gerald, you cannot suppose that I would leave them under such a delusion; especially as, sooner or later, they must know that your heart and hand are pledged elsewhere.'

'When that time arrives, they will make the discovery that they were mistaken in their conjectures; and, as the mystery of my sudden departure — if, indeed it be a mystery in their eyes — will have long since lost its bloom, they will not think it worth any further investigation. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. But there is really no

difficulty. All the letters I have received since I have been here have been addressed to the "Poste Restante." I have called at the Post Office since I left them at the hotel early this morning to drive up to the Platz with Colonel O'Driscoll, and we have not met in the interval. Nothing is easier for me than to say that I have had a communication which renders it desirable for me to go back to England without delay. I shall tell them so to-night.'

The dark shades of evening were falling; the music had ceased; the promenaders were rapidly dispersing. Our party bent their steps homewards. Cecilia and I, still left in the rear by the common consent of the others, walked side by side in silence until we had arrived within a few yards of the Quatre Saisons.

'Are you coming in to join us at tea?' inquired she.

'No!' said I, holding out my hand to her. 'We part here. Good night — and God bless you!'

She took my extended hand and cordially returned its pressure, leaving in it, to my

surprise, a very small object wrapped in silver paper.

‘You will, I hope, accept and perhaps wear this in memory of me,’ said she. ‘If you look at it occasionally, and remember it always, it may do you good service in many a moment of danger.’

‘Is it a talisman?’ inquired I, with a smile.

‘Yes,’ answered she; ‘the talisman of faith — of truth — of patience — of resignation! Farewell!’

We parted; and I hurried home to my hotel in some doubt as to the strict propriety of my proceedings during the last few weeks, but in none whatever as to the expediency of my departure from Wiesbaden on the morrow. My impression on this point was not greatly strengthened by the incident of Cecilia’s parting gift, the nature of which I had accurately conjectured before I had light and opportunity to examine it. It proved to be a small golden crucifix of the most minute proportions and the most elaborate workmanship.

The reader will not be surprised to learn that I have never parted with it. But I am

not bound to tell him whether I still wear it under my waistcoat. *If I do*, he may rest assured that it is no ground of present or retrospective jealousy to any one who may have a right to investigate these confidential details of the toilet.

CHAPTER VII.

COUNTY POLITICS AND DOMESTIC DIPLOMACY.

I WAS as good as my word: starting the next morning from Biebrich in time to catch the earliest available boat on its way down to Coblentz.

The announcement of my intended departure, made overnight to my brother and his wife, on their return from Lady Bulstrode's, was heard with much surprise and a good deal of urgent remonstrance. I did not, however, as the reader is aware, consider myself at liberty to assign the true reason for a proceeding which certainly required some explanation; and I resigned myself, as best I could, to the certainty that my anxious relatives, naturally incredulous as to the arrival of any summons from England rendering it imperative on me to leave Wiesbaden at so short a notice, would ascribe this sudden resolution to something

unpleasant which had passed between Cecilia and myself.

There was no help for it, however; and so, consoling myself with the reflection that *tôt ou tard, tout se sait*, I left it to time to vindicate my conduct and motives, and, in the meantime, as I had said to Cecilia, I left my character behind me.

I returned as I had come, *viâ* Paris, where I lingered for a week or ten days, finding a mild course of Scribe, Melesville, and Company, at the Variétés and elsewhere, no bad specific for the blue devils under which I was suffering; and it was not until the middle of October that I found myself once more in London, with nearly three weeks of my leave unexpired.

The preserves at Osmanby were reported to be in excellent condition. Very pretty cub-hunting was to be had twice a week with the Berkeley hounds, within a ten or twelve miles ride to cover—not to speak of milder performances with an indifferent county pack nearer home. I had a serviceable hack and a clever fencer at free rack and manger in the paternal stables. My mother was in very delicate health; my father grievously out of spirits

and (politically) out of temper. Duty and inclination combined to draw me homewards; and to Osmanby I went accordingly.

My arrival had rather a cheering effect on Sir Philip, who in his new character of a Conservative (a term then gradually superseding the time-honoured name of Tory) was glad of a little domestic sympathy, very genuine at least, if not very enlightened, in his recently adopted opinions.

I have already said that the Tories in the House did not, as a body, seem very much impressed by the importance of my personal addition to their ranks; and with that candour which the reader will not have failed to observe as the prominent characteristic of this veracious history, I have said enough to rescue the party from the charge of injustice in their very moderate estimate of my parliamentary pretensions. It was therefore with some surprise that I found myself, during my short visit to Osmanby at this period, the object of unmistakable *prévenances* on the part of the Tory landholders and farmers who mustered in large numbers in the county, where, indeed, parties were so nicely balanced that, for a good many years past, the two seats had been occupied

by a couple of portly landed proprietors, of strongly contrasted opinions, whose names were never by any chance to be found in the same column of the division list.

As, however, the provisions of the Reform Bill, which the Ministry were about to bring forward in the session of 1832, could be pretty accurately conjectured by reference to the measure thrown out in 1831, it was matter of moral certainty that the forthcoming *programme* would include the addition of a third county member to our existing representation; and a fierce contest of the two parties for the possession of this seat—the occupant of which must, *cæteris paribus*, turn the scale of political influence in the house in favour of one or the other, as far as the ——shire county constituency was concerned—might be reckoned upon as inevitable.

In this emergency, my father, naturally enough, occurred to the leading Tories, as a very fit person to ‘bell the cat’ on behalf of his new allies. His standing and character in the county were all that could be desired; his talents far above mediocrity; his rent-roll quoted at a figure that seemed to justify a liberal outlay of cash on his part for so desir-

able an object; and the certain loss of his present seat, involved in the contemplated suppression of the doomed borough of Plumberstown, would render the prospect of a triumphant return for the county doubly attractive.

Some members of the party had already sounded him on the subject; but, to their disappointment, he did not rise very readily to the bait, and, at all events, declined to pledge himself for the moment, affecting to think, what few in the existing state of popular feeling could delude themselves by hoping, that the coming bill would never pass into a law.

It seemed, therefore, desirable to bring all available influences to bear upon him that politico-social tactics would supply; and it was, I have no doubt, in due developement of these views that when I made my appearance at an early meet of the hounds, a day or two after my arrival in ——shire, I was greeted by all the Tory sportsmen in the field with a degree of affectionate cordiality that quite overpowered me.

The puritanical owner of Belenthorpe Hall, Mr. Blayds,—whose dread of the Pope was notorious, and from whom, in ordinary times,

I had received the scantiest measure of bare civility compatible with his recognition of my claims as the son of an old county neighbour,—was the first to grasp me by the hand, expressing the greatest delight at seeing me, and inquiring, with a most touching amount of solicitude, after the health of my father and mother. Lord Manleverer, usually the very pink of stately courtesy, as befitted an ancient baron with the longest pedigree—next to my own—in the county, actually ‘emancipated himself,’ as our friends in Paris phrase it, to the extent of slapping me on the shoulder, with a cheery ‘How are you, Gerald, my boy?’ that did one’s heart good to hear; followed up, after some engaging family talk, by the assurance that he had seen with the greatest satisfaction, from the division lists of the foregoing session, how steadily I had been resisting the progress of the revolutionary measures with which we were threatened. And Colonel Gorges, the boldest rider and the shrewdest judge of horse-flesh among us, who was in the habit of stigmatising all horses that came under his observation—except his own—by various uncomplimentary epithets, ranging in condemnatory severity, between ‘a bit of a screw’

and ‘a promising piece of carrion;’ not only broke out into spontaneous gratulation on the subject of my robust personal appearance after the fatigues of the session, but actually complimented me on the apparent capabilities of my horse, who looked, he said, ‘well up to the day’s work, and did some credit to the meet, as well as his rider.’ Nor was our ‘blue’ county member more backward in friendly demonstrations, or less anxious to put me in good humour with myself and my companions; although he had never addressed a word to me during the session, and, I verily believe, hardly knew me by sight, as he lived at the other end of the county, seldom showed in the hunting-field, being much too bulky for the sport, and in London was to be classed in the category of ‘*Boodledom*,’ which I need not say was, in spite of its local proximity to the haunts of a more advanced civilisation, very much out of my line.

All this was very well and very pleasant in its way; enhancing the enjoyment of a very fair run, at the conclusion of which, after killing ‘very prettily,’—as our dandified master of the hounds phrased it, I was pottering leisurely homewards, in a kind of rocking-

horse canter, on my steady old hack, when I was overtaken by old Stilwell of the Grange, another sturdy and influential supporter of the 'blue' interest who had been out with the hounds, and whose route partly coincided with my own. He was a near neighbour of Osmanby Manor; and, with his wife and fat daughters, was on terms of very friendly intimacy with our family.

'That is a clever nag of yours,' said he, after a few general observations about the day's sport.

'Pretty fair,' said I. 'He has seen his best days. But he answers my purpose well enough in riding to cover and so on.'

'I thought,' said he, 'it was not the horse I saw you on in the field.'

'No,' said I. '*He* will make his way home by easy stages. Not that there is anything, heaven knows, in our mild — shire practice, at this time of the year, to knock up a horse of any bottom.'

'You young fellows,' said my elderly friend, — whose hunting, in the full sense of the word, was matter of history — 'have so much superfluous vitality in you that you are never satisfied unless you are risking your

own necks, as well as the lives of your horses, by attempting impossible leaps, and all that sort of thing. However, I have no right to censure the rising generation on that score : for I was just as fool-hardy when I was at your time of life.'

' *Consule Planco*,' said I.

' Yes,' or, as Byron has it

In my hot youth, when George the Third was King.

But, be that as it may, it is a pleasure to see an officer in the Guards so well up to the hounds as you are.'

' Nay,' said I, ' I have no claim to be considered more than a mere average horseman. But what makes you think so humbly of the capabilities of the Guards in the hunting field? '

' Your cavalry seat, you know, is quite a distinct thing from ours,' said Stilwell.

' *Cavalry seat!* ' exclaimed I, turning round in my saddle, with an indignant start,—' you are not, surely, confounding *us* with the Life-guards? '

' Upon my word,' said he, ' I am afraid I was so far benighted.—What is the difference? '

‘The difference, said I, ‘between sterling silver and Brummagem ware. THE GUARDS are the three regiments of Foot-guards, and no other branch of the service can usurp the distinction. Not but that your disparaging estimate of the riding of the Household Cavalry is wholly undeserved. All the world knows that George Greenwood, of the 2nd Life-Guards, is the best man in England across country.’

‘Well,’ said he, laughing, ‘I must humbly apologise for under-rating the horsemanship of you London dandies,—whether horse or foot. You know I am almost of the pigtail order myself, and know little about the modern world. But I cannot afford to quarrel with you; for I want your cooperation, as we all do, in a very important matter.

‘My cooperation!’ said I. ‘I need hardly assure you, my dear sir, that I should be happy to be of service to you or any other of my friends in the county. But I am at a loss to divine in what way the cooperation of a fellow like myself can be serviceable to you great landowners of —shire.’

‘Why, you know, when this infernal Bill passes,—which it will, and be d—d to it;

God forgive me, — we shall have to return a third county member.'

'Well,' said I, with a grin, 'I suppose you don't want to return *me* ?'

'Not exactly — at least, at present. But we do want — indeed we have set our hearts on persuading your father to stand for the third seat, and, like a good fellow, you must coax him to accede to our wishes.'

'I am afraid,' said I, 'you over-rate the political influence of the household brigade, as much as you under-rate their horsemanship. He will be guided on a question of this sort by more experienced judgements than mine. Besides I am really not sufficiently well read in county politics to form an opinion of his chances of success. It would annoy me if he were to be beaten. I should have thought that you, or any other tory of older date would, *cæteris paribus*, be a safer card, as a candidate. He is so very recent a convert, and the opposition to him will be all the more venomous.'

'His triumph will be the greater. A man whose honest convictions have brought him round to our side, in the teeth of his own interest — being otherwise so fit to represent us

—is precisely the man we want. We are not ignorant of the sacrifices he has made, although he is the last man to talk about them. It is no secret that he has refused a peerage as the price of his acquiescence in this revolutionary measure.'

'Indeed!' said I.

'Oh! come, now!—you need not affect ignorance on the subject. *I have reason to know the fact.*'

When a man says he has 'reason to know' that such or such a thing is the case, you may generally conclude that he is making an assertion on very slender grounds of belief or information of very doubtful authenticity. *I had reason to know* that my friend Mr. Stilwell was talking very much at random, or, at least, jumping to a conclusion on insufficient *data*. It was not, however, my business to deprive my father of the credit due to so magnanimous a disregard of consequences in the performance of a patriotic duty. Besides the rumour, although not literally or formally true, was, I suspected, in substance, not very wide of the mark.

'Well,' said I. 'It would be very satisfactory to me to see him at the head of the poll

for the county; and I shall certainly not dissuade him from standing, if you can guarantee his return. The fathers of the day, however, are very intractable people, and generally decline to be guided by the most enlightened specimens of the rising generation in the shape of a younger son, who can't even assist them in cutting off an entail, or cutting down timber for hustings' wood. 'Now, if it were *my mother* you wanted as a candidate, my persuasive influence might, perhaps, be effectually brought into play.'

'That's the very point!' exclaimed my diplomatic friend, with rather an incautious eagerness. 'I know you can do what you please with Lady Osmanby, and I have some good grounds for believing'—(he did not quite say he had 'reason to know')—'that your father's hesitation on the subject is traceable to—to—'

'To what?' asked I. 'Petticoat government in the shape of my mother? You don't really mean *that*, my good Sir? Even if my father were a man to be hen-pecked—and I confess the suggestion is, to me, the very essence of comicality—those who have known mother so long would hardly, I should have

thought, suspect her of usurping the domestic sceptre.'

'My dear Osmanby,' said my companion, rather fidgety at the turn I was giving to his observations, 'you must not take up my words in that way. You must be a sort of Bluebeard in your theory of a husband's prerogative. A man is not necessarily hen-pecked because he consults his wife in important matters, and is sometimes guided by her advice, if she is a woman of sense. To that extent, I may plead guilty to the charge of being hen-pecked myself.'

Here, be it observed, Mr. Stilwell rather understated his case. It was the received belief—what Sanchez or Escobar might have described as '*Opinio probabilis*'—that Mrs. Stilwell was viceroy over him. But then, Mrs. Stilwell weighed about sixteen stone, had an undeniable beard, and a voice and manner which seemed to convey an emphatic warning that she was not to be trifled with. Whereas, my mother—but the comparison was too insulting!

'Well,' said I, 'I should be the last man to depreciate the sex, or their legitimate influence. But, according to my experience of

them, the most sensible women are the least prone to be dogmatic in politics ; and my mother is certainly not chargeable with any such tendency.'

'I never insinuated that she was. All I meant was that she does not, as I believe, much encourage the idea of your father's standing for the county ; and, with the most unfeigned respect for her, as well as for my good friend, Sir Philip, I am inclined to think that if you can remove *her* objections, you will not strengthen *his*. And now, my dear fellow, as you seem to me to share our views, I feel confident that we can reckon upon your influence—no matter in what quarter it may be exerted—to advance them.'

This brought us to the point where our roads diverged, and I bade him good evening.

The whole matter had taken me by surprise. I had heard no suggestion, since my arrival at Osmanby, of any such project being on the *tapis*. I did not understand why my father had omitted to mention its existence in the course of our political talk, which had been, as I thought, unreserved on both sides. As to my mother, beyond the expression of annoyance of the impending loss of the two

family seats for Plumperstown, and the injurious effect of the Reform Agitation on the social atmosphere of London, I had seldom heard her utter a word relating to the Bill or its results. I was, therefore, inclined to view her alleged interference in county politics in the light of a good joke; and on my return home I took an early opportunity of relating to her what had passed between Mr. Stilwell and myself, which, I took for granted, would be as little intelligible to her as to myself.

To my surprise, however, she answered very gravely:

‘It is quite true. Mr. Stilwell has been correctly informed. I am very much averse to the notion of Sir Philip becoming a candidate for the county; and I am exerting all my influence, such as it is, to deter him from such a step.’

‘You astonish me!’ said I. ‘Why should you object to a proceeding which seems to hold out a prospect of the most effective compensation for the loss of his present seat.’

‘I object to it,’ answered my mother, ‘because, in the first place, I hate party feuds with old friends and country neighbours; in the second place, I fear the ill effects on his constitution of the wear and tear inseparable

from a contested election ; in the third place, I dread the expense. Your father cannot afford it, and he knows it. For your own sake, my dear Gerald, as well as for his, I must entreat you not to encourage him in so disastrous a project.'

'As you wish, my dear mother,' said I ; 'I own I had hardly given a thought to the pecuniary question. But why do you say *for my sake*? Surely, my father's affairs have not become alarmingly involved ?

'I do not say they have. But I am sure that, with the numerous calls upon him, he lives fully up to his income. I thought I had made you understand that, my dear boy, when I was obliged to refuse your request to sound him on the subject of your entanglement with that Miss Conyers.' And here my mother heaved a deep sigh.

'I am sorry to perceive,' said I, 'that you are not less opposed to my views now than you were when we last discussed them.'

'You know well, my dear child,' said my mother, 'that I have no wish in the matter but for your happiness. I had, I confess, been indulging a hope that you were getting over this boyish fancy, and—I do not say it to reproach you—but your behaviour at Wies-

baden seems to have justified that impression; and I fear you have been rather incautious, to say the least of it, in your attentions to poor Cecilia Grainger, if you meant nothing by them.'

'This is Josephine's report of me, I conclude. But does she represent Miss Grainger as complaining of my conduct?'

'Of course not. Poor dear Cecilia has far too much pride and proper self-respect for that. But really the facts speak for themselves.'

'What *are* the facts, my dear mother?'

'Now, my dear Gerald, do not be uncandid. Can you deny that you have been paying the closest attention to that poor girl during the whole time of your stay at Wiesbaden?'

'I do not deny that I have been very much in her society; and indeed Lady Bulstrode and Josephine, between them, took very good care to secure that object. I admit that I have made myself generally useful to Cecilia, who is a dear good creature, by keeping off bores and checking the intrusive advances of fortune-hunters, English and foreign. By doing so, I believe, I got credit with some of these fellows for being a favoured suitor; and

I had, in consequence, the gratification of being nearly entrapped into a duel with a Russian prince, who was one of her rejected swains.'

'My dear boy!' exclaimed my mother, in horrified amazement, 'How did it happen? I heard nothing of that.'

'So much the better, for I am not particularly anxious to be proclaimed to the world as Cecilia's champion, though I am, and always shall be, her attached friend. That I have not led her to believe that I was, or even could be, more to her you will readily understand when I tell you that she, and she alone, of all my female friends shares with you the knowledge of what you call my "*entanglement*" with Mary Conyers, and I believe I have her warm sympathy in the affair.'

'Well,' said her ladyship, with another deep sigh, 'I do not see what right you had to speak to her on such a subject. That sort of sentimental confidence between a young unmarried woman and a young man places them both in a false position, and seldom leads to good. If you were not prepared to seek her society for her own sake, you would have done better to stay away.'

‘ Nothing more true, my dear mother! Had I known that Lady Bulstrode and her daughter were at Wiesbaden, I should probably have shirked the expedition altogether. Do you happen to know whose fault it is that the fact in question was studiously concealed from me until I arrived there? ’

My mother was silent; and a slight glow, not of displeasure, but of embarrassment, spread itself over her usually pale and ever gentle countenance. I determined to pursue my advantage.

‘ If,’ continued I, ‘ a trap is deliberately laid for me, am I to blame if I have fallen into it—or because, having done so, I have extricated myself as best I could, and with as little injury as possible to myself or any one else? If Cecilia does not blame me, surely nobody is entitled to say that I have behaved ill to her. Had *she* thought so, she would hardly have given me this, as a *souvenir* of her friendly regard.’

So saying, I produced from under the recesses of my waistcoat, the little golden crucifix, the mention of which has, I fear, already shocked the feelings of my low-church readers, while more sympathetic Belgravia, if these pages

meet her eye, will perhaps note the incident with greater equanimity and a more charitable interpretation.

‘Poor girl! poor dear Cecilia!’ exclaimed my mother, after examining what appeared to me so very innocent a pledge of truly platonic regard. ‘It is just as I thought! It won’t do, Gerald! Your reasoning is very plausible, if not very convincing either to me or to yourself. I know a little more of human nature, my dear. You meant no harm, I dare say. But you have carried away the poor girl’s heart; and what is more—YOU KNOW IT.’

I am afraid it was now my turn to look foolish. Her ladyship had given me a Rowland for my Oliver. We were quits! I shrugged my shoulders; replaced poor Cecilia’s ‘talisman’ round my neck, kissed my mother’s pale cheek, and dropped the subject.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH THE READER WILL FIND RATHER DULL,
AND MAY SKIP IF HE PLEASES.

THE Autumn and Winter of that year are by no means *cretâ notandi* in the records of my life: although it is rather to the dark shadow of coming events than to the occurrence of any positive misfortune that I must attribute the gloom which still hangs over the remembrance of that period.

The aspect of politics and of domestic affairs seemed alike unsatisfactory. The coming session could not fail to extinguish me as a senator. But this was the least of my grievances. I had far deeper cause of anxiety in the visibly declining state of my mother's health, and a growing conviction that my father's means were seriously crippled. Of this a very unusual tardiness in paying in the quarter's allowance to my credit at Green-

wood's, appeared to me a symptom. I mentioned my suspicions on the subject to my brother. But though he refrained from saying anything to corroborate them, I could not but interpret his suddenly avowed intention to resume the active duties of his profession—if he should have interest enough at the Horse Guards to obtain a colonial staff-appointment—as a proof that he shared my apprehensions, and was desirous of lightening the pressure on Sir Philip's finances, by breaking up his own rather expensive establishment in London.

Whatever ill-natured cynics may be disposed to think; the reader, in whose liberal interpretation of my acts and feelings I have the fullest confidence, will not require the assurance that the birth of a son-and-heir, in the Harley Street *ménage*, in the early part of the spring, is not to be reckoned as an item in the list of my annoyances. But I had other and sufficient causes of family discomfort.

As far as the ladies were concerned, I was very much out of favour both in Portman Square and Harley Street. My mother and Mrs. Osmanby had, as the reader has seen, set their hearts on bringing about a marriage between Miss Grainger and myself; and in their

disappointment at the failure of this project, they were of one accord as to the expediency of throwing all the blame upon me.

In spite of my protestations to the contrary, and, indeed, in the teeth of Cecilia's emphatic assurances, addressed to Joséphine after my departure from Wiesbaden, they persisted in believing that I had behaved very ill, and trifled most unfeelingly with the affections of that amiable heiress.

The frequent lamentations on the subject which it was my misfortune to hear, amounted to a grievance of a very trying character. Her name was never mentioned in my presence except in a tone of reproachful commiseration, intended apparently to stigmatize me as the author of that sad despondency to which she was supposed to be a prey: and when, in the early part of the spring, a letter from Lady Bulstrode, who, with her daughter, had returned to England, and joined his lordship at the family seat in the north, announced that Cecilia, in spite of the entreaties by which she was assailed on all sides, was about to enter her noviciate at the Convent at Princethorpe, I had to encounter the most urgent remonstrances from my mother, on the culpable

infatuation which could induce me to throw away the certainty of such brilliant prosperity, and the reasonable assurance of so much domestic happiness, for the sake of a mere boyish caprice ; while Joséphine, not exactly authorised, as a sister-in-law, to venture on such point-blank appeals to my pocket, my heart, or my conscience, did everything which the mute eloquence of looks and tears could effect, to impress me with a due sense of my deplorable obduracy, as, in less direct condemnation of my conduct, she deplored the sad fate of one so deserving of every happiness this world could afford.

In a quiet way, also, George added his contingent to the besieging forces ; and on the first opportunity which occurred of speaking to me in private, could not but express his wonder, after all that he had seen and heard at Wiesbaden, how I could reconcile it to myself, as a reasonable man, and a kind-hearted fellow as I was, to let things take the turn they had taken.

‘ George,’ said I, ‘ there is one maxim which was very early impressed upon my attention by an elderly philosopher with a termagant wife, as the result of combined observation

and experience. In my small way, I have seen a good deal that appears to corroborate the theory; and I am convinced that, whatever may be the exceptions, if any, to its universal application, it holds good in my case.'

'What is it?' enquired George.

'Simply this: that although it may often be necessary to refrain from marrying the right lady, it never can be expedient to marry the *wrong* one.'

'But, how, if you have made violent love to her?' said George.

'Not even then,' said I, 'unless you have been entrapped into a promise, and, like a female Shylock, she insists on holding you to your bond. In my case, both these conditions are wanting, and not less so, the incident which you suggest as supplying the exception to my rule. In the first place, Miss Grainger does not expect me to marry her—secondly, I have never promised to do so—and thirdly, I have not made love to her either violently or mildly.'

'Can you look me in the face,' said George, 'and say that you believe she would not be delighted to marry you if you were to ask her?'

'My dear fellow!' said I, such is my popu-

larity amongst the girls, that I could not act, in a general way, on the result of that test, without great risk of extensive polygamy. In this instance, however, I should be perfectly safe. I have the highest moral certainty that Cecilia Grainger would not accept me as a husband if I gave her the refusal of my precious self.'

'I wish I could book you for a bet on the subject,' rejoined George.

'I might give you very long odds with perfect security. But I have too much respect and regard for the lady in question to make her the subject of any such sporting practice. We are warm friends, and can never be more to each other.'

'Platonic affection is all moonshine,' said George.

'I so far agree with you' rejoined I, 'that I think it would be little better than lunacy to marry on the strength of it.'

'A fortune of three hundred thousand pounds!' said George, musingly, with a deep sigh.

'*Hinc illæ lacrymæ*,' said I, 'I do not affect to despise money. I feel the want of it, at this present moment. It can effect wonders, no

doubt. But there is one thing it cannot do—it cannot purchase happiness.’

‘It can sometimes save you from a good deal of misery,’ observed George.

‘Well,’ said I, ‘You will tell me I suppose that if it cannot buy happiness, it can buy a very good imitation of it. But I should not be satisfied with the counterfeit. I have too strong a belief in the existence of the genuine article.’

‘There is no use in discussing the matter,’ said George. ‘There is but one way of accounting for your conduct. I am convinced that, after all, you are involved in some deplorable entanglement.’

‘You are not complimentary, George, I must say,’ said I. ‘Even without the assurances I have given you on the subject, I might perhaps expect a little more charity in your conjectures. Are the Guards, as a class, such irreclaimable reprobates that the exemplary officers of the line cannot believe them capable of a virtuous attachment?’

‘Oh! then you admit the attachment. I was sure of it. But what inference can I possibly draw, when you are so mysterious about it; I, who have a right to your confidence?’

‘Therein lies the fallacy, my dear George. No married man has a right to a bachelor’s confidence, unless in a case where he is prepared to extend it to the wife. If I had thought you could keep a secret from Joséphine, I would not have left you so long in the dark. But you know, if I had told you, it would have oozed out long ago. Don’t be offended—once married, I shall not guarantee my own discretion any more than yours. I very much approve the theory of a man having no secrets from his wife. Whenever I have secured the right lady, I shall act rigidly on that principle.’

‘I am sure,’ said George, ‘there is nobody on whose sympathy and secrecy you can rely more than on Joséphine’s.’

‘No! my dear George: admitting the secrecy, for the sake of the argument, the sympathy would be more than she could achieve—or you either.’

‘When you say that, it is fair to surmise that your choice is one of which you have reason to be ashamed.’

‘Nothing can be more *unfair* in principle, or more libellous in fact. Joséphine is bent on marrying me to a Catholic. *You* think it

my bounden duty to captivate an heiress. *My right lady is neither.*'

'Am I acquainted with her?' asked George.

'No! and I much doubt if you have ever seen her. Alas! it is very doubtful whether *I* shall ever see her again. If I do, it will probably be as the wife of another.'

'When that happens, she will, I hope, cease to be the right lady.'

'Of course. But no one can ever succeed to her in that capacity.'

'What!' said George, laughing. 'The vacant appointment will not be filled up, but abolished. I am sceptical on that point. But you must well know, Gerald, that far from urging you to a mercenary match, at the expense of your happiness, I should be ready to make a great sacrifice of present means and future expectancies, to promote your reasonable views. Once satisfy me that the object of your attachment is personally and socially worthy to be received as your wife, and I will spare no pains to reconcile my father to the match, and afford him every facility which my position in the family entail can supply towards securing a suitable provision for yourself and your bride. This I am ready to undertake at

once, although I do not disguise from you that I think the present moment rather unfavourable to the attempt of bringing any such project under his notice. Can I, or ought I to say more, as a brother deeply interested in your happiness?

‘Dear George,’ exclaimed I, grasping his hand, ‘you do indeed rebuke my spirit and generously requite my unworthy want of confidence in your affection. But I am not in a position to claim your kind interference, or embroil you in any such discussion with my father. I have but too much reason to know that the moment is unfavourable; and I am pledged to my mother, who is in the secret of my attachment, but, I am sorry to say, withholds her approval—not to moot the point at present with my father. You shall, however, hear all that there is to be told; and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that the object of my choice is by birth and connexions entitled to look much higher than a poor devil of a younger brother like myself.’

Thereupon I entered with full details into the history of my feelings with regard to Mary Conyers, and the position in which I stood towards her, which, while leaving her free, pledged

me to a fidelity from which I would contemplate no release short of her marriage to another.

For a man who had, himself, entered into a precipitate engagement, and made a love-match in the fullest sense of the term, George was edifyingly indulgent and wonderfully sympathetic in discussing my conduct. Although for reasons in which I entirely concurred, he deprecated any immediate appeal to my father on the subject, he expressed a confident hope that he might, at no distant period, forward my views, however unpromising their present aspect, and assured me that whenever he should see his opportunity, he would exert his influence to the utmost in behalf of what he considered my very reasonable wishes. He thought that as soon as the worry and anxiety of the Reform Bill should have passed away, there was good reason to hope that my father would recover his usual spirits and be disposed to view all public and private matters of discussion with his usual placidity. In the meantime, the delay would test the constancy of the young lady's feelings, as well as of my own; and it would be all the better for us both, in the long run.

I did my best to acquiesce in George's reasoning; and if I could not exactly share his hopes or emulate his philosophy, I was somewhat cheered by his earnest sympathy, and in spite of my general distrust of married men as the depositaries of a secret, well content to rely on the assurance of his discretion.

In due course of time I received a letter from Conyers, written from the Cape. He had learned on his arrival at that station that the General, whose health had rather suddenly given way, had been ordered thither by his medical advisers, and was at that moment at Cape Town, on a visit at the Government House. His illness was not considered serious enough to involve the resignation of his command, which would be exercised, *pro tempore*, by the senior brigadier of the division; and it was hoped that change of air and climate would, in a few months, completely restore him. In the meantime, this state of things had the effect of materially altering the immediate plans of both Hugh and his sister, or perhaps, to speak more accurately, I should say, Hugh's plans with regard to both.

Sir Robert had been keeping a good look-out for his son, as several India-bound vessels had

successively appeared off the Cape; and, before he had landed, Hugh was met by the announcement that the rest of his voyage to Calcutta must be deferred for the present: the General having made all necessary arrangements for the extension of his leave, and requiring his personal attendance during the remainder of his own sick furlough.

The appearance of Mary, however, whose departure from England had been decided upon without waiting for instructions from headquarters, took the General by surprise, and, as I could collect from the tone of Hugh's letter, occasioned a little embarrassment. It is needless to say that *her* progress to India was also suspended for the moment, and that she, too, was to remain at the Cape until further orders.

Although Hugh did not say so in express terms, it was to be inferred that Sir Robert did not greatly approve of the course adopted by him on the occasion of Lady Greystoke's death; and the letter left me in doubt as to what had been determined on with regard to Mary's future movements. Hugh made no direct allusion to what had passed between us at our parting interview; but the half-dozen lines of postscript were, in my view, not without their

significance, and did not appear to me altogether discouraging. They were as follows:—

‘Mary desires to be kindly remembered to you. Did I tell you that, when at Leeds, she was asked to join the *cotton-spinning fraternity* by a wealthy and corpulent cousin of ours at that smoky town—with what success, I need not say. Mind, this is not to be spoken of. She is much admired here; but, between ourselves, she will not, I think, discover much fascination in the garrison or official society of this lively colony.’

On the whole, this letter, in spite of its discreet reserve and the uncertainty in which it left some important points on which I desired to be informed, had a cheering effect on my spirits, and, consequently, did more to brace me up for the fatigues and annoyances of the parliamentary session, than all the wisdom I could extract from the daily pages of the ‘Standard’—at that time the chief and able advocate of public virtue and patriotism, as understood in Conservative philosophy.’

CHAPTER IX.

AN ELECTIONEERING TRIUMPH — RATHER DEAR
AT THE MONEY — A DOMESTIC CALAMITY.

THE Reform Bill passed, and in due course of time came the dissolution. Plumperstown was extinguished, but ——shire, as had been anticipated, obtained a third seat.

My father, partially recovered from the depression consequent on the breach with his party, had rallied his energy and spirits sufficiently to make a temperate and effective speech against the ministerial measure, at I forget which of the many stages of its progress through the House. This had much enhanced the favour with which he was looked on by his new allies in the county. They renewed their urgent entreaties that he would come forward as a candidate for one of the seats; and, in spite of my mother's endeavours to dissuade him, he was prevailed upon, in an evil hour, to comply with their wishes.

In adopting this resolution, he did not even go through the form of consulting either George or myself; an omission which grieved us both, although we could not go the length of saying, with a filial moralist of my acquaintance, that 'it was very undutiful behaviour.'

It was, however, quite intelligible and consistent. Except in merely technical or strictly professional matters, men generally seek advice, not as a lantern to guide, but as a staff to support them on their onward course. To ask counsel from others, when you have made up your mind to act irrespectively of its tenour, and have reason to apprehend that it may be adverse to your own predetermined views, is scarcely more rational than to encumber yourself with a broken crutch, when you are about to start on a long walk, through which you feel that your legs are adequate to sustain you unassisted. You may or may not over-estimate their powers of progression or endurance; but you are certain that you will not get on the faster for a prop that breaks down under you if you attempt to lean upon it.

The contest was sharp and exciting. The Whigs started a retired haberdasher, who had

recently purchased large estates in the county, as their candidate for the new seat. Both parties were willing enough that the former members should retain their position undisturbed, and no fifth candidate made his appearance to complicate the electioneering programme.

The clause in the new Act restricting the time for voting to two days, was, perhaps, the only part of the measure which commanded the approval of all reasonable men of every shade of party, as calculated to diminish the heavy expense of a contested election. I fear my father relied too implicitly on this presumed result of the recent legislation. He had no personal experience of the rapidity with which money is got rid of, on these occasions, by means strictly within the range of constitutional expenditure, as understood by those who take 'broad views' of the subject. He gave *carte-blanche* to his enthusiastic agents, whose conduct greatly facilitated the process of his enlightenment on this point. After a fierce struggle, he was returned at the head of the poll, and the haberdasher left some hundreds behind the last of the successful candidates.

It was, no doubt, as everybody declared, a glorious triumph. Unfortunately it was a very expensive one, as Sir Philip did not fail to discover, when, in due time, the electioneering bills came in. They amounted to little short of 10,000*l*.

The victory, as in many another well-fought field, was a barren one. After the first excitement of success had passed away, came the comparative estimate of its value and its cost. The result of this investigation was not very exhilarating. My father's spirits, buoyed up for a time, sunk to a still lower level than they had exhibited before the session. In addition to political or financial troubles, he had soon, alas! a far more trying cause of depression.

My mother's health, which had been gradually and almost imperceptibly giving way during the last few years, now gave signs of a sudden and rapid decline. Although nothing could ever impair the uniform sweetness of her temper, it was evident to all around her that anxiety of mind was hastening the progress of physical disease.

As, day by day, she grew weaker and weaker, and, fully conscious of her own danger, spoke

with calm resignation of her approaching end, there was something in her pre-occupied manner and care-worn look which impressed me with a strong conviction that they were attributable to causes very distinct from the mere contemplation of death, however awful its approach in the eyes of even the most blameless Christian.

Alarmed by the sudden evidences of her failing strength, and anxious to place her within daily reach of the skilful London practitioner who had carefully watched her constitution for many years past, my father had returned with her to Portman Square, as early as the end of September. My battalion being then on duty at the Tower, I was still in London, but about to apply for leave, with the intention of joining a party of friends in a deer-stalking trip to the Highlands. One glance at my mother's face, however, on her arrival in town, revealed to me so fearful a change for the worse in her health, during the short interval that had elapsed since I had left her at Osmanby, that I felt it impossible to absent myself from London.

Her first care, on arriving in town, was to obtain the ministrations of religion; nor,

until she had been comforted by the solemn rites of the Church, did she seem to feel at liberty to occupy her mind with temporal affairs in connection with her approaching end.

In my father's presence she affected to share the hopes he expressed of her speedy recovery, and acquiesce in the sanguine view of her symptoms, in which he was always striving to detect some slight amendment. With me, however, she attempted no concealment on the subject; and while addressing to me those words of impressive exhortation on my moral and religious duties which, falling from the dying lips of a virtuous and beloved mother, are not easily effaced from the heart or memory of a Christian man, she urged on me the pious task of comforting and supporting my father under a trial the overwhelming severity of which, in his case, she justly appreciated, and but too clearly foresaw.

It seemed, indeed, likely that he would be chiefly dependent on me for such consolation as filial affection and sympathy could supply on the occasion of her loss. George had succeeded in obtaining a high staff appointment in His Majesty's forces in the Ionian Islands, and, with Joséphine and their young family, was

on the eve of embarking for Corfu. Their departure could not be delayed for many weeks, and some years would probably elapse before their return to England. In the meantime, Joséphine—as far as the engrossing occupations of the moment, at such a crisis of her own affairs, would permit—was most assiduous in her attentions to my mother; and George was equally anxious to exhibit towards her, in her last moments, that respectful affection which she had ever deserved at his hands.

It is hardly necessary to say that, while in all but daily expectation of my mother's death, I was, for the time, too much pre-occupied by the painful feelings inseparable from the occasion, to allow of my thoughts dwelling long on subjects of anxiety merely personal to myself. But considering how fully I had put her in possession of my wishes and views, in reference to the most important interests of my life, I could not but remark, as something rather singular, that, while speaking unreservedly of her approaching death, and expressing her earnest solicitude for my temporal and spiritual welfare, she studiously refrained from all allusion to Mary Conyers, or to the supposed

financial embarrassments of my father, which had, as I well knew, occasioned her so much anxiety.

Every now and then, as I sat by her couch, with her wasted hand in mine, in moments when my father was absent from the room, I observed her watching my countenance with an expression of painful interest ; and, when seemingly on the point of addressing me on some important matter, suddenly checking herself after two or three preliminary words, the purport of which I could not always catch, while their object, whether enquiry or statement, was wholly unascertainable.

Though my curiosity was painfully excited by these indications of a wish to say something that might, for aught I knew, be of vital importance to my happiness, I dared not run the risk of agitating or distressing her, in the utterly prostrate condition of her bodily strength, by requiring an explanation of what was passing in her mind. Indeed I was in great apprehension lest the sentence that seemed hovering on her lips might shape itself into a solemn appeal to my sense of filial duty in reference to what I believed to be the wish

nearest her heart, — viz., an union between Cecilia Grainger and myself. To refuse the dying request of a mother such as mine would have been a severe trial, although I should not have shrunk from it. Thank God! the words I dreaded to hear remained unspoken.

It was, however, with a feeling of something more than curiosity — indeed with a painful sense of mortification — that, two days before her death, when the last ray of hope had vanished from the heart of every one about her, I found her requesting to speak a few words in private to George; and, on his compliance with her wishes, detaining him by her bedside in secret conference for upwards of half an hour; while I, her only child, was excluded from the room.

It was clear that the communication withheld from me was to be made to my brother. God knows, I did not grudge him any mark of her affection; but surely, whatever was the confidence bestowed on him, I had some claim to share it. How was it that I, who had never wilfully offended or displeased her, was not to be trusted?

George's countenance and demeanour, as he left the sick-room, were not such as to relieve

my anxiety on any point. His face bore traces of deep agitation ; and in answer to an enquiry which I did not hesitate to make, as to what had passed between my mother and himself, he merely shook his head, saying, ‘ Do not ask me. I must not tell you now, at all events.’

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED RENCONTRE: SURPRISE AND
PERPLEXITY.

I DROP the curtain on the closing scene, on my poor father's passionate grief, and the desolation of spirit which succeeded the first outburst of his affliction. Weeks and months rolled by; and Time, as usual, did its work, bringing, if not much inward comfort, at least outward composure.

George and his wife took their departure for Corfu within a few weeks after my mother's death; but not until the arrival, from Ireland, of my sister and Lord Belturbet had done something towards lightening my heavy task of consoling the inconsolable. They brought with them a rather numerous tribe of infant Machahons, who, thanks to the good sense and judicious discipline of their mother, were not unreasonably noisy or troublesome; and although my aunt Tarleton, whose ministra-

tions of comfort were generally formed on the patriarchal model supplied by the Book of Job, was constantly assuring Maud that her poor papa's nerves must be sadly tried by little Theresa's fearful brogue, and little Fitzherbert's astounding appetite—and occasionally hinting that one or other of the darlings had all the appearance of sickening for the small-pox or scarlet-fever—the sight of these little people had rather a favourable effect on Sir Philip's spirits. When, towards the close of the year, he made up his mind to go back to Osmanby, whither my regimental duties prevented me from accompanying him, I was well pleased to find that he was to be escorted by the Belturbet party *en masse*, in his return to that now desolate home; and that Maud and the younger children were, in any event, to remain with him until he could be prevailed upon to come up to town after the meeting of Parliament, when we hoped that he might resume his ordinary habits, and endeavour to redeem the pledges he had made to his new constituency.

In the course of the autumn, I had received a second letter from Conyers, who was still at the Cape with his father. He reported a

considerable improvement in the General's health, and announced his approaching return to the head-quarters of his division, whither, of course, Hugh was about to accompany him.

It was evident, from the contents of his letter, that one from me, written in immediate acknowledgment of his first communication from Cape Town, had not reached his hands, as he reproached me for not writing, adding these words, which caused me some perplexity:—

‘I do not know whether your silence is to be viewed in any way in connection with the rumours that have reached us here, as to which I discreetly forbear to question you; well knowing that when you do write you will tell me, with your usual frankness, all that there is to be told. The General,’ he continued, ‘seems still undecided in his plans about Mary, which, I think, will be mainly determined by the tenor of his next advices from England. So we shall not leave for Calcutta until after their arrival, and after we have completed such arrangements as their purport, one way or the other, may render necessary. Lord Charles, and all the Govern-

ment House set, are as attentive to us as possible; and there are a few decent people among the officials, civil and military. But I am heartily sick of the combined provincialism and pipe-clay of this garrison life, in which I have no active duties to discharge. Mary is not much more enamoured of the locality; not feeling any great interest in the never-ending still beginning gossip about local quarrels and flirtations, and steering very clear, herself, of the latter kind of entanglement. It is certainly not easy to keep one's intellect down to the working level of the colonial mind.'

It was true that Hugh was good-naturedly anxious to reassure me on the subject most likely to excite painful misgivings on my part. But what were the rumours to which he alluded? And if, as I must assume, they related to me or mine, through what channel had they made their way to Cape Town? Could it be that they related to Cecilia Grainger? If so, how doubly provoking that my letter should have miscarried, as in it I had distinctly mentioned the fact of her having entered her novitiate at Princethorpe.

On the arrival of Hugh's letter, I did my best to repair any possible mischief occasioned

by the miscarriage of my former despatch, which I subsequently ascertained to have gone to the bottom, with the other contents of the mail-bag, through the wreck, off St. Helena, of the ship on board which it had been sent out. I wrote again to Hugh by the earliest available ship, speaking most unreservedly on all points connected with myself, my hopes or prospects, and taking good care to recapitulate the most important contents of my missing letter—not forgetting the novitiate of the fair Cecilia, on whose decided vocation for the monastic state I enlarged, I fear, with more complacency than unction.

Up to the time of my mother's death, I had heard nothing more on the subject of Hugh or his family. There was no farther letter from the Cape ; and I was not acquainted with any near connection of his, in England, through whose channel I could hope to obtain information as to Mary's movements, undecided as they seemed to be, at the date of his last communication.

It was the dead season of the year. Lady Chedworth, the only person to whom I could have addressed myself with a fair chance of success in such an inquiry, was not in town.

I had left my card on Mrs. Hoskyns, on the morning after the memorable ball. But no farther social communication had taken place between that worthy lady and myself in the interval that had since elapsed—a period of more than eighteen months—so that, assuming her to be in London, I did not feel authorized to intrude on her by a morning visit, the motive of which would have been too transparent.

Christmas came and went;—a sad Christmas to me and mine. One day, in the early part of January, being on guard at St. James's, I was walking down Pall Mall with a brother officer on duty; and as we passed by Harding's shop, my companion, a highly susceptible youth, always on the look-out for conquests, was suddenly attracted by the occupant of a quiet-looking chariot that stood at the door.

‘By Jove, Osmanby!’ exclaimed he, in a voice nearly loud enough for a stage whisper, ‘Look there!’ I turned, and looked back towards the carriage. The head of a lady appeared at the window. My eyes met those of—Mary Conyers!

The next instant I was at the carriage door.

But I shall never forget the look which greeted me. Mary was as pale as death—her countenance was grave almost to sternness. As I approached, she drew back into the corner of the carriage, taking no notice of my outstretched hand, which eagerly sought hers through the open window.

‘Mary!’ exclaimed I. ‘Is it possible? When did you return? Will you not speak to me?’

Ere she had time to answer, a hand was placed on my arm. I turned round.

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ said the footman in attendance, touching his hat; ‘my lady is waiting to get in.’ I stepped aside with an apologetic bow; the door was opened, the steps let down, and a portly matron, who had just come out of the shop, curtsied graciously to me as she passed into the carriage, while Mary retreated to the farther corner.

Up went the steps—bang went the door—‘Home!’ cried the footman, as he got up behind; and the carriage drove off in the direction of St. James’s Street.

‘Home!’—where was ‘home?’ Under what circumstances had Mary returned to England, and why was her manner so wofully changed

towards me? How should I trace her? The carriage, apparently a job one, bore no coat of arms that could have given me a clue to the name of Mary's chaperon. A coachman out of livery, and a footman in a plain drab great coat, afforded no more promising materials for investigation. How should I contrive to obtain an explanation of all that so thoroughly perplexed and bewildered me in Mary's demeanour? Such were the thoughts that crowded on my mind, as I answered as laconically as possible the numerous questions of my 'brother-in-arms' on the subject of my fair friend and her fat companion.

Whether he was vexed at my want of communicativeness, or had really remarked her chilling reception of my civilities, I cannot exactly say. But he made me wince by observing: 'I hope you're not far gone: for it's evidently a bad spec. Take my word for it, Jerry, you ain't the right man. She gave you a look that was meant for an extinguisher, or I never saw one.'

'No one disputes your experience in that line,' said I, trying to carry off my annoyance by a show of repartee. 'You must shut your eyes habitually in your philandering moments,

my dear fellow, if you can't detect a very general desire among your female friends to snuff you out with all possible despatch.'

'Precisely,' said he, not easily outflanked, and with the very comfortable consciousness of being, as he was, one of the handsomest fellows in the household brigade. 'Just as Semele, or whatever her name was, would have been glad to snuff out Jupiter, when his brilliancy became too dazzling for mortal eyes, and she was about to be reduced to ashes—like the poor lady at Calcutta, who fell a victim to a coup-de-soleil while at dinner with her husband, and was swept away at once by the butler!'

CHAPTER XI.

OSMANBY MANOR.

THE course of events soon diverted my thoughts into another and not less painful channel. Two days after my short and unsatisfactory meeting with Mary Conyers, the post brought me the following letter from my sister.

‘Osmanby, Jan. 1833.

‘DEAREST GERALD,—I have very bad news to communicate. Poor papa was taken very ill yesterday morning, and to-day is much worse. Dr. Graham, whom I sent for at once, from N——, says it is an attack of paralysis, and thinks him in great danger. If you possibly can, come down to us by the mid-day coach. I will send a carriage to the Blue Boar at N—— to meet you. Unfortunately, some unexpected law business obliged Belturbet to return to Ireland last week, and, as you may

suppose, I am in great want of your support, under such trying circumstances.

‘Yours affectionately,

‘MAUD BELTURBET.’

Luckily, I was not on guard, and my commanding officer being within hail, I had no difficulty in obtaining a few days' leave and making all necessary arrangements so as to reach the White Horse Cellar by twelve o'clock. The coach was about to start, and I was in time to secure the box-seat, next to the driver, who happened to be no other than the distinguished baronet whom I have already noticed as pursuing the noble vocation in question.

The mention of my father's illness naturally turned the conversation into the channel of family and county affairs, including the recent election, the result of which was highly satisfactory to Sir ——, who, in spite of his democratic habits and broken fortunes, was a staunch Tory. He was a very good-natured fellow, in general, and little disposed to make himself disagreeable to those who, like myself, did not hold that the baronet and *ci-devant* officer of light dragoons were socially merged in the stage-coachman. But like most ruined men, he was

apt to dwell with complacency, more or less evident, on the pecuniary scrapes of his neighbours, and was given to confident predictions that 'poor Dick *This* couldn't get through another year'—that 'Tom *That* stood to win or lose more on the ensuing Derby than the fee simple of his estate would fetch in the market'—and that 'Lord *T'other* would have to shut up Guttleborough and undergo a course of dry-nursing at Brussels or Tours, before six months were over his head.' On the present occasion, Sir ——'s favourite theme was supplied by the enormous expenses of the recent contest for ——shire.

'It was a great triumph to the Tory party,' said he, 'but I am afraid Sir Philip has had to pay through the nose for his victory. I have seen a good deal of electioneering life, and I certainly never knew a bigger set of rogues than the chief electioneering agents of your county. Old Dumbleton (the defeated Whig candidate), to my certain knowledge, has been obliged to go abroad to retrench, in consequence of the heavy outlay into which he has been inveigled by his friends; and—I wont mention names—but somebody who ought to know, assured me the other day that

he wouldn't take 30,000*l.* to pay your father's bills on the occasion.'

'Your friend who *ought to know*,' said I, 'ought to know better than to talk such nonsense. It is perfectly absurd.'

'I think you were not in ——shire during the election,' observed my pertinacious friend.

'I was not. But I have had abundant means of ascertaining the fact from those who were. Such a contest, I am aware, is not to be carried on for nothing ; but your informant's estimate is preposterous ; and whatever the figure may be, I have the satisfaction of knowing that my father's share of the expense has been fully discharged.'

'*That* I can easily believe,' said Sir ——. 'I'll back old Timmins of N—— against any attorney in the land, for the pace at which he goes in hunting up the amount of a bill of costs. But, as you very justly observe—to yourself—though you have not uttered the sentiment aloud—it's no business of mine.'

I was too well bred to contradict him, and was not sorry to drop the subject, the discussion of which did not tend to lessen the weight of anxiety that oppressed me.

I left the coach at N——, where we arrived

about six in the evening. But, to my surprise, and somewhat to my alarm, the people at the Blue Boar could give me no tidings of the carriage which was to have been sent to meet me. There was, however, in those days, no delay in procuring a chaise and pair at so noted a posting-house, and in five minutes from the time of my arrival, I was well started—and at a brisk canter on the road to Osmanby.

The distance was not quite nine miles—the road as smooth and level as a bowling-green; the posters were fresh, and the post-boy—a boy in years as well as by virtue of his office, was little inclined to let the grass grow under his horse's hoofs. It may well be supposed that we did not lose much time on the journey. It was a short hour by my watch; but I have seldom experienced so long a one.

At length we drove through the village, and pulled up at the lodge-gates. Poor old lame Mrs. Briggs, who had been on duty at that entrance since the end of the last century, hobbled out, with a lanthorn in her hand, to admit the carriage. The heavy iron gates swung back on each side, and as we passed in, she held up the light and recognised me, as I looked out of the window on her side.

‘Oh, sir! oh, Master Gerald!’ exclaimed the old woman, half crying as she spoke, ‘I be glad you be comed, sir. Things is terrible bad up at the house, sure-ly!’

‘What do you mean, Mrs. Briggs?’ said I, almost gasping for breath. ‘My father is not—not worse, I hope.’

‘No, Master Gerald—not as I knows on. My lady did say as how he wur rayther better this morning, but—’

‘Well, well!’ said I, ‘I can’t stop—drive on, post-boy, as fast as you can.’

At full gallop, we swept along through the stately avenue of ancient elms—in all the dreary gloom of their bare trunks and leafless branches, as they loomed spectral and gigantic in the starlight of a clear frosty evening in January. It was a grand old avenue, nearly a quarter of a mile in length. Nor was the view less imposing, by daylight, at least, as you emerged into the open park, with its undulating ground, its richly wooded knolls, its deep ravines, its venerable oaks—the vast expanse of forest scenery in the distance, and the fine old pile of Tudor architecture, looking down from a proud eminence, on the varied scene of sylvan beauty.

The reader will not imagine that I was in a mood to dwell much on the picturesque features of the place, had I even had light to observe them, as I drove through the park on this anxious night. But, in the midst of my anxiety, they flashed in sad remembrance across my mind, as I thought, with melancholy and true foreboding, that Osmanby — my well-loved Osmanby — so long my home, would soon be my home no longer.

Five minutes more brought us to the house, and as we drove up to the portico I could not but be struck by the unusual darkness of the entrance-hall, in which, as could be seen through the plate-glass of the folding entrance doors, there was no lamp burning.

The post-boy gave a loud peal at the bell; and in a minute or two, some one appeared with a light. As I jumped out of the chaise and ran up the steps, the door was opened by Welbank, the butler, who held a flaring tallow candle in a brass kitchen candlestick. His face was as white as a sheet.

‘How is my father, Welbank?’ enquired I, eagerly.

‘Much the same, Mr. Gerald. The doctors

thought him a trifle better this afternoon. I am glad you are come, sir.

‘Can I go to him at once?’

‘I believe — that is — I don’t know. I should like just to speak a word to you first, sir,’ said the old man, in visible agitation. ‘Here, William,’ cried he to a footman who had just made his appearance. Take Captain Osmanby’s portmanteau to his room.

‘Well,’ said I, ‘be quick, Welbank, in what you have to say, for I must see my sister at once. By the by, why was the carriage not sent to meet me?’

‘That’s it, sir,’ said Welbank. ‘I wanted to tell you — only, please, sir, don’t let her ladyship know.

‘What do you mean, Welbeck?’ said I. ‘And why do you keep me standing here? Send somebody to let Lady Belturbet know I am arrived; and if you have anything particular to say to me, come into the library.’

‘Oh! Mr. Gerald,’ said Welbank; ‘I beg your pardon, sir, but please don’t go in there.’

As he spoke, I had reached the door of the room in question; and on opening it, I was surprised to find a rough-looking man, in a

drab great-coat and muddy boots, seated in my father's library chair, smoking a short pipe, and reading a newspaper by the light of a solitary tallow candle.

‘What is the meaning of this?’ enquired I, addressing Welbank. ‘Who is this person, and what is his business here?’

‘Please, Mr. Gerald, it's not my fault; I can't get him to leave the room.’

‘But he *shall* leave the room,’ said I, as I strode towards him. ‘Who the deuce are you, sir? and what do you do here?’

‘Take it coolly, master!’ said the man, removing the pipe from his mouth, and looking up at me very quietly. ‘Take it coolly, and keep a civil tongue in your head. It's all right — I'm in possession.’

‘In possession!’ exclaimed I. ‘Good heavens! Surely Welbank, this fellow is not . . .’

‘Yes, Mr. Gerald, I am sorry to say he is a sheriff's officer. There's an execution in the house, sir. Oh! Mr. Gerald, that I should have lived to see this day at Osmanby!’—and the old man fairly burst into tears.

‘I was very much perplexed by this discovery. But I had long been haunted by misgivings as to my father's pecuniary affairs,

and was therefore not wholly unprepared for a crisis.

‘Come, Welbank!’ said I, as cheerily as I could. ‘Don’t be foolish. I have no doubt it is something arising out of my father’s inability to attend to business for the last few weeks. I dare say I shall be able to set it all right to-morrow. In the meantime just settle with the postboy, who is still at the door. I have paid for the horses—and ask him to wait, as I may have a fare back to N—— for him.’

So saying, I handed my purse to Welbank, who left the room in obedience to my directions.

‘What is the amount of the debt?’ asked I of the bailiff.

‘The writ is marked for two thousand, sir,’ said the man, in a more respectful tone, and rising from his chair.

‘Who is the creditor?’

‘Squire Blenkinsop, sir.’

‘What! the banker at N——?’

‘Yes, sir. Leastways, I believe it be him. I know the name’s Blenkinsop.’

‘Who is the attorney employed?’

‘Mr. Cadby, of N——.’

‘He is the under-sheriff, is he not?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Well, my friend, you have a right to be in the house, of course, in the performance of your duty, and while the writ is in force. But it will not be quite safe for you to behave with any incivility, or to obtrude yourself without necessity into the private apartments of the family.’

‘I don’t mean to be uncivil, sir, and I’ve not been uncivil; and I’m sure I don’t want to sit in this here room, which is cold enough, without a bit of fire. But the servants they called me and my partner a lot of blackguard names, and made the servants’ hall and scullery too hot to hold us. Blest if one great strapping wench of a kitchen-maid didn’t threaten to run me through with a red-hot poker. And though we’ve been here ever since twelve o’clock, we’ve not been able to get so much as a drop of beer, or a bit of bread and cheese.’

‘Where is your partner, as you call him?’ said I.

‘He’s in the hoflices—that is, keeping watch over the stables, and the like.’

‘Welbank,’ said I to the butler, as he re-entered the room, ‘these men are not to

blame. They are only doing their duty in remaining here, and if they behave with civility, it is my wish that they be made comfortable for the night. They must have supper, and a fair allowance of beer; and tell the servants it is my particular request that they be not annoyed by abusive language, as long as they do not provoke it by misbehaviour.'

'No one thought of abusing them, sir,' said Welbank, 'until they refused to let the horses be put-to, that we might send the carriage for you, as her ladyship had ordered.'

'You know, sir,' said the man, apologetically, 'that it would be as much as my place is worth, for me to let property be moved off the premises, while I am in possession under the writ. And Mr. Cadby's head-clerk, Mr. Glegg, he 'as come with us to see us serve it reg'lar, he says, says he, when he was just getting into his trap to go back to town. "Mind, Tugwell," says he (that's my name, sir). "Mind, Tugwell, you'll not let nothink be stirred in the house or the stables."'

'Mr. Glegg,' said I, 'cannot authorise you to interfere with my property. I have a couple of horses and a dog-cart here.'

'So I told them, Mr. Gerald,' said Welbank.

‘We didn’t ought to take it on *your* telling,’ said Tugwell. ‘I dare say it’s all right, as this ’ere gen’leman says it is so. But we ’adn’t so much as an affidavit of the fact to purtect us.’

‘Well,’ said I, ‘it’s not worth discussing at this moment. There is the chaise that brought me, at the door. John, or the under-butler, can go in it as it returns. I must send to N——, with as little delay as possible for Mr. Timmins.’

‘I wanted to send for him, sir,’ said Welbank, ‘when the carriage was to have gone for you; and I was doubly vexed because I couldn’t. But I sent a note by Gibley, the butcher’s man, who came up to the house about three o’clock, and was going back to N—— in an hour or so, and I expect Mr. Timmins will be here in the course of the evening, or early in the morning. I told him you were expected to-night.’

‘You did right, Welbank. But I cannot trust to that. Let John be ready to start in twenty minutes. I will write a line.’

‘If you please, Mr. Gerald, I will go myself; and if I can find Mr. Timmins, I will get fresh horses at the Blue Boar, and bring him back with me.’

‘That will be the best thing to do, Welbank. And now, where shall I find Lady Belturbet?’

‘Her ladyship is in the small dining-room, sir, where you will find a good fire, and the table laid for your dinner.’

‘Very good. Before you start, Welbank, you will dispose of Mr. Tugwell and his companion in a fitter part of the house; and, mind, they are to be well treated. Tell the servants there is no cause for alarm; I shall soon arrange matters when I have seen Mr. Timmins.’

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ said Welbank, as I left the room; ‘please don’t let her ladyship know what’s happened. Nobody has told her. She’s in trouble enough already about Sir Philip.’

I found Maud in the small dining-room, anxiously awaiting my appearance. Our meeting was sad enough, and her account of my father anything but cheering. He had lost all power of motion on one side; and, although his face was not distorted, he could utter no articulate sound. He did not appear to have lost his consciousness; and Dr. Graham, who, together with the Osmanby apothecary, had been with

him until a late hour in the afternoon, seemed to think he might rally ; and, in the meantime, had given strict injunctions that he should be kept as quiet as possible. It was thought better that I should not be admitted to see him until the next day.

Maud who had both good sense and strong nerves, was calm and composed. ‘Poor Gerald!’ said she, ‘you have found even greater trials awaiting you here than my letter had led you to expect.’

‘What do you allude to, Maud?’ enquired I, ‘my father does not seem to be worse than I was prepared to find him.’

‘But you were probably not prepared to find the house in the possession of sheriffs’ officers,’ said she. ‘However, you are spared the additional worry of concealment,’ continued she, with a faint smile. ‘Poor old Welbank, and the servants generally, have done their best to keep it from me, and think they have succeeded. But my Norah, the nursery maid, saw the men come in, and told me within five minutes of their arrival, though she had not heard a word that passed.’

The reader may here observe the characteristic development of national habits and feelings.

The idea of an execution in the house would suffice to throw most English ladies of rank into a state of uncontrollable agitation, even if they should stop short of a regular fit of hysterics. But Maud, though an English-woman by birth and education, was a resident Irish peeress, and was acclimatised to the normal condition of Hibernian landowners before the passing of the 'Encumbered Estate Act.' A '*fi. fa.*' was, in her eyes, merely an occasional but perfectly natural incident of household tenancy—annoying, certainly—like the fall of a stack of chimneys in a high wind, or some temporary derangement of the kitchen range on the eve of a large dinner-party; but a thing to be set right, or patched up, by hook or by crook, in a few days. So, also, to the common run of Abigails in an English county family of high position, a bailiff is as much a myth as an ogre or a fiery dragon. '*Omne ignotum pro mirifico*'—while, on the other hand, to the little nursery-maid from the county Monaghan, the presence of a process-server was revealed at a single glance through a sort of instinctive recognition.

It was, however, a great relief to me to find my sister so well able to grapple with the

annoyances of the position, which, after the first moment of surprise and vexation, did not appear to me very formidable. I had little doubt, that with the aid of Mr. Timmins, my father's provincial solicitor, a very shrewd man of business, and, in spite of the disparaging judgment passed upon him by my coaching friend, an honest straightforward man, I should be able to effect some arrangement, though, of course, not without pledging my personal security for the amount of the debt, by means of which I might clear the house of Mr. Tugwell and his colleague within the next twenty-four hours.

Having given Maud an assurance to this effect, which much relieved her mind, I was obliged to yield to her entreaties that I would go through the ceremony of dinner, in which, an all but empty form in her case on the present occasion, she proposed to keep me in countenance. I therefore sought my room for the purpose of making such slight and hurried toilet arrangements as comfort required and time would admit of, preparatory to our sitting down to our cheerless meal.

While busily engaged in getting rid of the dust of my journey, I was interrupted by a

slight tap at the door, followed, after the usual 'Come in' from me, by the entrance of old Welbank.

'If you please, Mr. Gerald,' said he, 'I am ready to go to N——, but if it's the same to you, I'd rather not start till her ladyship and you have dined. My lady will think it odd that I should be away.'

'As you please, Welbank,' said I, willing to humour the old man's respectful punctiliousness. 'We shall not delay you long, I dare say. But recollect that I am very anxious to see Mr. Timmins to-night, if possible.'

'Yes, sir—of course—of course.' Welbank still lingered in the room, affecting to draw the window-curtains closer together, and give a brightening touch to the fire. He cleared his throat once or twice with a short nervous cough. It was evident that there was something else on his mind.

'Is there anything more you want to say to me, Welbank?' inquired I. 'If so, you must make haste, for I am just going down.'

'Well, Mr. Gerald, there is just one thing. I hope you won't take it ill.'

'I will promise you that beforehand, Welbank. But what is it?'

‘Why, sir—you see—I’ve been in Sir Philip’s service ever since he came to the title, and in his father’s before him, since I was twenty years old. I’ve been butler and house-steward at Osmanby, here, and in Portman Square, since long before you were born, Mr. Gerald.’

‘Well, my good friend, I know all that, and don’t require to be reminded of it. You are an attached and faithful servant of the family, and I hope you will long remain so; but you know, my good Welbank, that if we should have the misfortune to lose my dear father, it is not I who will have the control of these matters.’

‘Oh, Mr. Gerald! you surely don’t think, sir, that I meant *that*,’ said Welbank, half reproachfully. ‘I was not thinking of myself, sir. What I want to say is this. I have had a good place—a very good place—and a good master, Mr. Gerald—the best of masters—in Sir Philip. I’ve saved money here, Mr. Gerald—enough, and more than enough, to keep me in my old days. I dare say, as you say, sir, you can arrange this sad business—you and Mr. Timmins together—without troubling Sir Philip; and even if he should not get better. But the great thing is to get rid

of these ruffians at once. I can't stand the sight of 'em, sir, not here at Osmanby. I've got a matter of a hundred pounds in the house, sir, and four hundred more in the savings' bank at N——. If you *would* but take it, Mr. Gerald. It will help, at least, with what you and Mr. Timmins can do, to get these vermin out of the house. If the worst happens, Mr. George would not, I know, let me be a loser; and I could wait his convenience, or indeed, for the matter of that, if I never got it back, I needn't miss it—I could manage without it. Do, pray, Mr. Gerald, say that you will take it!' and the tears rolled down the old man's cheeks as he spoke.

Poor old Welbank! It was true he *had* had a good place of it, with capital opportunities of feathering his nest, which, *more suorum*, he had, I dare say, not altogether neglected. Had my father been his own butler and house-steward, and, as such, exercised a due control over his own expenditure, I suspect the presence of bailiffs would not at that moment have desecrated the ancient hearth of Osmanby Manor. But domestic service in what are called 'good families' has its own conventional standard of financial morality. Tried by that

test, Welbank was, I doubt not, irreproachable. Swayed by the rules of a severer code of ethics, a cynic might suggest that the proffered assistance partook of the character of restitution or conscience money. But it must be admitted that the theory of restitution could not well be practically developed in a more graceful form.

For my part, I could scarcely control my emotion as I met poor Welbank's earnest appeal with the assurance that it was wholly unnecessary for me to trespass on the generous devotion to the interests of his master and the credit of the family, which had prompted his touching offer. But half convinced, he insisted on treating my refusal as conditional on the immediate success of the measures I was about to take in concert with Mr. Timmins.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SIEGE IS RAISED.

WELBANK'S journey to N—— was rendered unnecessary by the arrival of Mr. Timmins, in obedience to the summons conveyed by the butcher, before dinner was over.

On receiving Welbank's note, he had lost no time in communicating with Mr. Cadby, the attorney who had sued out the writ, between whom and himself there existed no greater amount of personal animosity than is inseparable from the mutual relations of two rival attorneys in a provincial town; and the result of their conference had been to pave the way for a speedy arrangement of the matter, on the assumption that I would agree to render myself personally liable for the amount of the debt.

It appeared that my father, on the occasion of his recent contest for the county, in which

Mr. Timmins had acted as his chief electioneering agent, had, as was correctly surmised by his friends and foes alike, incurred very heavy expenses; all, of course, of a strictly legitimate and constitutional character, as Mr. Timmins solemnly, and, let us hope, truly averred. The settlement of many of these claims might, according to Timmins's statement, have very well stood over for a few months; and Timmins had certainly not pressed Sir Philip on the subject. But my father had appeared to view it as a point of honour that the whole of his election bills should be forthwith discharged. He had, as he thought, made ample provision for this. But on the final audit of the divers claims, the sum-total was found to exceed by nearly 2,000*l.* the funds which he had set apart as immediately available for the purpose.

Having failed, as Mr. Timmins surmised, to obtain the necessary accommodation from Childes',—his London bankers,—or being perhaps unwilling to reduce the balance destined to meet his current expenditure,—he had applied to Messrs. Blenkinsop and Hare of N——, with whom he generally kept an account while at Osmanby, as a matter of

local convenience, to advance him the required amount; and after some hesitation the senior partner, Mr. Blenkinsop, who was the capitalist of the firm, agreed, in his individual capacity, to lend the 2,000*l.* on the understanding that it was to be repaid within four months; he receiving at the same time Sir Philip's bond for the amount, secured by a judgment to be enforced in the event of the money not being forthcoming at the end of the period so specified.

According to this arrangement, the money became payable at the end of the year; and application had been accordingly made, on behalf of the creditor, to Mr. Timmins, as Sir Philip's solicitor and agent in the matter, for payment of the amount.

The state of my father's health and spirits, since the death of my mother, had rendered him very unfit to attend to business; but on receiving a communication from Mr. Timmins on the subject of the debt, he had made an appointment to see him at Osmanby on a day in the ensuing week; and Timmins entertained no doubt that immediate arrangements would have been made for the settlement of the debt had Sir Philip been then able to enter upon

the discussion of the affair. On the day fixed, however, Timmins, on his arrival at Osmanby, had found my father confined to his bed with an inflammatory cold, which wholly incapacitated him for business at the moment. He had subsequently written to say that he was better and proposed to see Mr. Timmins at his own office on the following Tuesday, when he hoped to be well enough to drive into N—— and give Mr. Timmins the necessary instructions for settling Mr. Blenkinsop's claim.

The delay of a week or ten days, however, had excited Mr. Blenkinsop's alarm; and as very unfavourable rumours were afloat on the subject of Sir Philip's health, not unaccompanied by grave doubts as to the state of his assets in the event of his death,—doubts not discouraged, at least, by the banker's solicitor, —Mr. Cadby, who had taken an active part in the election on the Whig side, both client and attorney came to the conclusion that there was no time to be lost in securing the means of enforcing the judgment. The writ was accordingly sued out, *ex abundanti cautela*, even before the day appointed by Sir Philip for his visit to Timmins, an arrangement which the latter had duly communicated to Mr. Cadby,

by way of reassuring Mr. Blenkinsop. But when, on the day in question, Sir Philip failed to make his appearance at N——, and, late in the afternoon, it became known that Dr. Graham had been summoned in haste to Osmanby Manor, Mr. Cadby resolved on immediate action on behalf of his client. Being himself the under sheriff, he had the working machinery under his hand; and before noon next morning the two myrmidons of the law, under the command of Mr. Glegg, the head clerk in Cadby's office, were well on their way to Osmanby.

On seeing Cadby, Mr. Timmins had taken care to inform him that *I* was expected at Osmanby in the course of the day, and had urged upon him the expediency of accepting my substituted liability for the debt, if, as Timmins doubted not, I should be willing to offer it. His superior knowledge of the family affairs enabled him to point out with effect to Mr. Cadby that, although the house at Osmanby was full of valuable property and effects of various kinds, but a very small portion, comparatively speaking, was available for the purposes of the execution. The old pictures, statuary, family plate, library books,

rare china, and costly antique furniture, being all, as he knew to a certainty, duly scheduled and included in the trusts of the settlement executed on the occasion of Sir Philip's first marriage, under the control and according to the views of his father, Sir Basil, who was at the time bent on securing as far as possible the devolution of these valuable objects in conformity with the descent of the title and estates. Although, therefore, Sir Philip had the use of them during his life, they were, in contemplation of law, vested in the trustees of the settlement, and, subject to my father's life-interest therein, held for the benefit of my brother, who would become absolutely entitled to them on succeeding to the estates.

In this state of things, any attempt at a sale on the premises under the authority of the sheriff was out of the question, as it would be at once stopped by an injunction from the Court of Chancery, so far as it should seek to affect the property in settlement. On the other hand, Sir Philip's life hung by a thread. In the event of his death, even greater difficulties might arise, in securing the benefit of the step so precipitately taken, from the change of ownership, as regarded the mansion; and, in all

probability, Sir Philip's affairs would not be arranged, nor his creditors satisfied, without the delay of a Chancery suit for the purpose of administering his estate. This was the substance of what Mr. Timmins stated to me as having been successfully urged by him on Mr. Cadby, as a reason for Mr. Blenkinsop's waiving the benefit of the execution, and accepting my personal liability for the debt.

'If I have your authority to effect that arrangement,' said Timmins, 'I will engage to clear the house of these men before one o'clock to-morrow.'

'But, Mr. Timmins,' said I, 'if I undertake to discharge the debt, where am I to get the money? I have no means of raising two thousand pounds, unless I sold my commission in the Guards, which I am not prepared to do.'

'You do not surely imagine, Captain Osmanby, that I would be instrumental in driving you to such a step. You will, if you act on my suggestion, give your bond for the money, with a warrant of attorney to confess judgment. I will arrange with Cadby that it shall not be enforced until you shall have had ample time to make arrangements. They will not,

of course, be satisfied with less than this ; because I stipulate that Sir Philip's bond is to be given up to you, and satisfaction is to be entered upon the judgment, which will thus be got rid of. You will see at once that your liability is merely nominal. If you pay the money yourself, and whether Sir Philip recovers or not, you will stand as a creditor against the estate for the amount. If he lives, and is again capable of performing any legal act, you cannot doubt that he will at once pay the money and release you, and it shall be my first care to see that he does so. Even in the event of his death, which we should all so deeply deplore, if you are called upon to pay the money before his estate is administered, it will be no serious inconvenience to you to advance it for a time ; as you will at once— I beg your pardon for such an allusion to your private affairs, but of course it is matter of notoriety—come into possession of the late Lady Osmanby's very handsome property, in which Sir Philip has merely a life-interest under her Ladyship's marriage-settlement. The knowledge of this has, I need hardly say, been of material aid in inducing Mr. Cadby to fall into our arrangements.'

‘*Our* arrangements!’ thought I; ‘well, I suppose they must be mine by adoption.’ If Mr. Timmins’s arguments did not quite convince me that I was running no risk in the matter, I found that I had no other course to suggest which would at once effect the object nearest to my heart, viz. the removal of the legal *incubus* under which the household at Osmanby were writhing in mingled rage and mortification. The worthy solicitor, acting on my behalf and in anticipation of my instructions, had certainly exhibited much vicarious energy and promptitude of filial self-sacrifice. He had at once accepted my position for me with exemplary *pluck* and fondness. I had nothing for it but to acquiesce.

‘We will lose no time about it,’ said my expeditious friend. ‘Anticipating your approval of what I had arranged, I have come prepared with the necessary form of document as regards the bond and the warrant of attorney. You can execute them at once, and you will have no farther trouble in the matter. I will take them back with me to-night; and you may rely on my not parting with them to the other side, until I obtain possession of Sir

Philip's bond, and see that the proper return is made on behalf of the sheriff, shewing that the judgment against Sir Philip is satisfied. I will be back here before one o'clock to-morrow, with full authority to eject your unpleasant visitors; and then I shall hope to hear a good report of Sir Philip.'

I obeyed Mr. Timmins's instructions with that unquestioning faith that we are all, from time to time, called upon to place in the wisdom and honesty of our ruling attorney; and so far as the immediate result of the transaction was concerned, I had no grounds for considering that confidence misplaced.

He was as good as his word. In spite of my request that he would remain for the night at Osmanby, where a bedroom had been got ready for him, he persisted in returning the same night to N——. An early interview next morning with Mr. Cadby and his client enabled him to complete the matter in time to redeem his promise of cleansing the house of what Welbank called the 'vermin,' by the middle of the day. The besieging force who, on the strength of a liberal interpretation put upon my words by that department of the establishment whose duty it was to construe

the meaning of 'a fair allowance of beer,'—had got very drunk over night—evacuated the place in good order and in perfect charity with the relieved garrison.

The grief of Welbank and the general indignation of the Housekeeper's Room and Servants' Hall at Osmanby were appeased: the attorneys on both sides were in a state of edifying complacency, not to say elation. My father's credit was saved; and I was thankful to have effected this object at whatever risk to myself. But I felt an unpleasant consciousness that I had tied a millstone round my neck, and had gone the first stage on the Road to Ruin.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CLOSING SCENE.

I NEED hardly say that this unpleasant episode in the domestic history of Osmanby Manor was studiously kept from the knowledge of my father, who rallied considerably in the course of the day, and the next morning was pronounced out of all immediate danger.

It was, however, but a short respite. Although the improvement in his health was sufficiently marked to admit of his leaving his bedroom at the end of a few days, and he had completely recovered his power of articulation, the effect of the attack on his general system was such as to justify the most gloomy apprehensions. An utter prostration of strength, and a visible wasting away of the outward man, were symptoms not to be overlooked either by himself or those around him. His

nerves were, as may be imagined, greatly weakened, and his usually placid and even temper had given place to a peevish irritability quite foreign to his natural disposition.

Feeling apparently but little confidence in the country practitioners who had been called in on the occasion of his seizure, he became very anxious to go up to London, in order, as he said, to be within reach of the best medical advice; and although he was very unfit to undertake such a journey, which could not fail to be attended with much injurious exertion and fatigue, we soon came to the conclusion that there would be more risk to his health in opposing his wishes on a point to which he seemed to attach so much importance, than in the attempt to bring him up to Portman Square by easy stages.

The matter was therefore so arranged, in compliance with his determination. He bore the removal to London better than we had anticipated; and it soon became apparent that he had other motives than those alleged for his great anxiety to reach town.

He met the proposal to send at once for Dr. Chambers and Mr. Hicks with a peremptory and angry prohibition; and the day after his

arrival, taking advantage of my absence on guard, he astonished Maud by announcing his intention of taking a solitary drive. It was not without the greatest reluctance, and every appearance of vexation, that he at length yielded to her strongly-expressed resolve of accompanying him. When he had been assisted into the carriage, and she had taken her place beside him, with an enquiry as to which of the parks he would prefer, he told her very abruptly that he had given his orders; and, to her great surprise, she found the coachman taking, as she thought, the direction of the City—a proceeding which was wholly inexplicable to her, until the carriage turned into Lincoln's Inn Fields, and drew up before the office of the family solicitors, Messrs. Scales and Sharpus.

Here Sir Philip, having ascertained that Mr. Scalés, the head-partner, was within, insisted on alighting, and desired Maud to remain in the carriage during his conference with the solicitor. To her great annoyance and distress, he was absent for more than an hour; and when at length he made his appearance, slowly supported down the door-steps by his footman and one of the clerks of the establishment, she

was painfully struck by the change in his countenance. It was clear to her that the interview had acted most injuriously on his shattered nervous system.

She could of course have expected no other result from so prolonged a discussion on matters of business, involving, as she feared, many unpleasant details. But she was not prepared for the immediate consequences. Having been replaced with great difficulty in the carriage, he could barely articulate the order 'Home.' He seemed in a state of merely partial consciousness during the greater part of the drive, and before they reached Portman Square, he had sunk into total insensibility. In this condition he was carried upstairs to his room, and placed on the bed from which he never rose.

Lady Belturbet lost no time in summoning medical aid; and our old friend Hicks was in immediate attendance. His report, however, but too decidedly confirmed by Chambers on his arrival an hour or two later, was most unfavourable. Sir Philip was suffering under a renewed attack of paralysis; and his exhausted condition left no hope of any but a fatal and speedy termination.

The event sadly justified their prognostics. Two days of apparent torpor, broken at intervals by a faint glimmer of returning consciousness—and all was over.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH I AM GREATLY ENLIGHTENED AS TO
THE STATE OF MY AFFAIRS.

THE recent state of my father's health had certainly prepared me for his loss as a probable and far from remote contingency. But the actual occurrence of his death was too sudden not to aggravate the affliction of the moment by a certain sense of bewilderment and perplexity.

At no period since his first seizure at Osmanby, had he been in a state which would have justified the attempt to engage him in conversation of a serious or exciting character. He had made no allusion to the probability of his early decease, and given no intimation of his wishes in reference to any domestic or pecuniary contingency that might arise out of such an event.

In taking upon myself, therefore, the melancholy duties appropriate to the occasion, I was wholly at a loss on many points where distinct

information as to the feelings and circumstances to which deference was chiefly due, seemed absolutely essential.

I had never heard my father speak of having made a will, but I had little doubt that such a document existed; and I was naturally desirous to ascertain whether its contents would throw any light on his wishes with regard to the place of his interment or the details of his funeral. I might indeed fairly assume, as I did, that he would desire to be buried in the family vault at Osmanby, where my mother's loved remains had been deposited but a few months previously. Still, before I decided on the final arrangements in accordance with this impression, I felt it incumbent on me to consult his testamentary dispositions, if any such were forthcoming.

Having made fruitless search for a will, or any memorandum indicating its existence, among my father's papers in his London house, I determined to apply at once, for information on the subject, to his solicitors, Messrs. Scales and Sharpus; and, accordingly, within two days after Sir Philip's death, I despatched a short note to Mr. Scales, with whom it appeared that he had been in very recent communi-

cation, announcing the melancholy event, and requesting that gentleman to call upon me, at his earliest convenience, in Portman Square.

Mr. Scales was very prompt in obeying my summons. He brought with him something more than bare professional sympathy. He was a very old acquaintance—indeed, I believe, a distant connection—of my mother, had been one of the trustees of her father's will, and, as such, had been appointed to act in the same capacity on her behalf, under her marriage settlement.

This had, originally, been his introduction to my father, with whom he was not long in establishing a high character for sense and judgement, which had led to his being occasionally employed in his professional capacity, although the general legal affairs of the family were, at that period, in the hands of another firm of solicitors. As Sir Philip's confidence in his skill and integrity had increased in the same *ratio* with the practical experience of his conduct, he had become, in process of time, my father's chief man of business; and for many years previous to this, the firm of Scales and Sharpus had acted in all affairs of importance as the legal advisers of the family.

Though naturally a good deal engrossed by my own feelings and perplexities, I could not help observing, on Mr. Scales's entrance into the room where I was awaiting his visit, that he exhibited a certain degree of embarrassment, almost amounting to agitation, while uttering the usual phrases of condolence on my recent loss. As, however, his relations with our family were, to some extent, those of private friendship as well as professional employment, I set down his confused manner to the score of genuine feeling and personal regret.

'I am sorry, my dear sir,' said I, 'to have been under the necessity of bringing you to this melancholy house under our sad circumstances; but, in my entire ignorance as to my dear father's affairs and arrangements, I had no alternative. In my brother's absence, I am obliged to take the management of everything on myself, and I require, on many points, information which, I think, you alone can supply. In the first place, I do not know whether my father has left a will.'

'I can, as you suppose,' said Mr. Scales, 'satisfy your mind on that point. Sir Philip executed a will about seven years ago, which was prepared by our firm from his instructions,

and it is now in our custody. I am myself the survivor of the two executors named in it, the other being the late Lord Campion.'

'A good deal has occurred within the last seven years,' said I, 'which may have induced him to alter the disposition of his property then made. There may be some more recent will or codicil at Osmanby.'

'I have his own assurance,' said Scales, 'given so lately as Wednesday last, when he called upon me in Lincoln's Inn—(I little thought, ill as he looked and seemed, that I was speaking to him for the last time)—I have his own assurance that he has not executed any subsequent will or testamentary document of any kind. As I concluded you would require to be made acquainted with its contents, I have brought with me, not the document itself, but what amounts to the same thing for our present purpose, the draft from which it was engrossed.'

'I am in no hurry to learn its contents,' said I, 'except so far as they may serve to guide me as to immediate arrangements.'

'In my position as executor,' said Mr. Scales, 'I am bound to take all trouble off your hands. You would of course wish, and

it would be quite right, that Sir Philip should be buried at Osmanby?’

‘Certainly. Then I shall trust to you to give all necessary directions. I have written to my brother-in-law, Lord Belturbet, who, I hope, will be here in two or three days, and who will, no doubt, go down with us to Osmanby to attend the funeral. For many reasons my sister and I wish that everything should be done as quietly as possible consistently with the decent observance of what is due to my father’s position. And this is all that I need trouble you with at present.’

‘Well, but,’ said Scales, ‘as I have brought the draft of the will with me, perhaps I may as well read it to you now as at any other time.’

‘To tell you the truth,’ said I, ‘my curiosity on the subject is not sufficiently great to overcome the repugnance I naturally feel to the discussion of matters of business without necessity at such a moment. The contents of the will do not, I fancy, materially affect me. I know that my brother must inherit the real estate; and as to the personal property, I have but too much reason to conjecture that, after all my poor father’s debts are paid, there cannot

be much to distribute. I should be well pleased to think that it was more, and that, whatever the amount, my sister might have the benefit of it.'

'But,' rejoined Scales, 'it was precisely about the comparatively small amount of the personalty that I was anxious to speak to you. I must first tell you, however, that you are mistaken in supposing the whole of the real estate to be in settlement. Osmanby Manor, and the ——shire property generally, pass, of course, to your brother Sir George' (how the words 'Sir George' seemed to strike with a startling and grating effect upon my ear!), 'together with the Fitzherbert estates, and the whole of the valuable effects in the nature of heirlooms both at Osmanby and Dereham Court. But the Llandyddlwm estate—the Monmouthshire property to which Sir Philip succeeded under the will of his maternal uncle, Admiral Glanvil—was at his own disposal, and is left absolutely to you. I am afraid, however, that your beneficial interest in it is not of much value.'

'How so?' enquired I.

'It is a small property, the rental not more than from 800*l.* to 1,000*l.* a year; and I regret

to say that it is in mortgage for an amount nearly if not quite equal to the value of the fee-simple. This would be of less consequence if the personal estate were sufficient to provide for the debts; as you would have a right, as devisee, to throw the charge on the personalty not specifically bequeathed. But I much fear that the amount of that fund will be quite inadequate.'

'It does not matter,' said I. 'I never expected to inherit any land from my father, and, as I have said, I fancied that the personal property might be left to my sister. I know that, from the state of my father's affairs, of which I had not the remotest idea a year ago, it cannot be a bequest of much value.'

'Lady Belturbet,' said Scales, 'is provided for to a certain extent under her mother's marriage settlement, by a charge on the Osmanby Manor estate; and Sir Philip also kept up a policy of insurance on his own life for her benefit, which was included in the property settled on her own marriage. He left this, his town house, with the furniture, and indeed all the valuable chattels that were not in settlement, to your lamented mother, Lady Osmanby, for life.

There are a few, a very few pecuniary legacies, but you are named as residuary legatee.'

'As you must perceive,' said I, 'I am quite prepared to find that there is no residue. Within the last three weeks, I have been obliged to pledge my personal liability to the extent of 2,000*l.*, in order to get rid of an execution at Osmanby.'

'You are surely not serious?' said Mr. Scales, looking very grave and rather alarmed.

'I think you may fairly assume that I am not likely to indulge in a joke on such a subject and at such a time. I mention it because the fact was studiously kept from my poor father's knowledge, he being then dangerously ill. I am told that if I pay the debt, which I suppose I must do, I shall have a claim to that amount against my father's estate. But should the entire loss fall on me, I am prepared to encounter it. I have always understood that my father, in the event of his surviving my mother, was to have a life-interest in her property. As I have had the misfortune to lose them both, I conclude that, as the only child of the marriage, I now succeed to the property.'

There was a pause, during which I was

startled to observe that the agitation which I had remarked in Scales's demeanour on his entering the room seemed to return with greatly increased violence. Drops of perspiration stood on his bald head; he turned very pale, and had much difficulty in adopting a calm and steady tone of voice when at length he prevailed on himself to speak.

‘This is what I feared,’ said he. ‘My dear sir, I have a most painful duty to perform. You have, I deeply regret to observe, been kept in ignorance of much that ought to have been communicated to you.’

‘What can you mean, Mr. Scales?’ said I. ‘Am I not entitled to my mother's property?’

‘To what there is left of it, certainly,’ answered he. ‘But I fear you can have no idea how small is the amount.’

‘This is incomprehensible,’ said I. ‘I have been always led to believe—indeed, I have been distinctly told by more than one member of my family—that my mother had 50,000*l.*, and that her fortune was strictly settled on herself and her issue—that my father could not touch a sixpence of the principal.’

‘That was quite true—in theory. The income was payable to Lady Osmanby's sepa-

rate use, for her life, free from all liability to Sir Philip's debts or engagements. He had a reversionary life-interest in the fund, contingent on his surviving her Ladyship, but during her life, I, as the acting trustee, received the dividends, and paid them to *her*, on her separate receipt. The principal, or, as we say, the *corpus* of the trust money, if not otherwise dealt with by her during her life, would, under the trusts of the settlement, as you suppose, belong, on the death of the survivor of your parents, to you, as the only child. But, unfortunately, dear Lady Osmanby, in spite of my urgent remonstrances on the subject, and indeed in the teeth of a very strong protest from Mr. Charles Butler, who settled the draft of the deed, insisted on retaining an absolute and unlimited power of appointment, overriding her own life-interest, and authorising her at any time to call upon the trustees for payment of the whole or any portion of the principal, as she might direct by a written document to be executed by her with certain formalities. She has thus, I grieve to say, been enabled to defeat, by her own act, the main object of her settlement.'

'But, good heavens!' exclaimed I, tho-

roughly bewildered by this startling announcement: ‘What object could my mother have had, in exercising this strange authority, to the detriment of her only child? What heavy expenses could she possibly incur, or require, distinct from those, the benefit of which she shared with my father? She, so unostentatious in her habits — so inexpensive in her personal tastes!’

‘You may rest assured that she had no expenses unknown to, or involving separate interests from, those of Sir Philip. Unfortunately, she could not be taught to recognise the existence of a separate interest. Whenever he wanted money — and of late years he has, at times, been subjected to a great deal of pecuniary pressure — she had not the strength of mind to resist his appeals. Thousands and tens of thousands of her fortune have, from time to time, gone in satisfying his liabilities. I solemnly assure you that I have repeatedly said and done everything which I could venture to say or do, consistently with my duty as trustee, and my position as solicitor and professional adviser to both, in the hope of restraining her from so disastrous a course of proceeding. But, as trustee, I had no alter-

native, and was bound to deal with the money according to her directions, when duly signified in the prescribed form.'

'Well, Mr. Scales,' said I, with as much calmness of manner as I could assume, 'what is done cannot be undone. How much of this goodly inheritance which was to have been mine—and which I have been, I must say, wantonly—I might almost say cruelly—allowed to reckon upon as my provision for life—how much of this remains to me?'

'There is now standing in the names of the trustees, and under my control, as the surviving trustee of the settlement, a sum of five thousand consols, and, I grieve to say, no more!'

'From which,' said I, as a sickening feeling of sudden ruin came over me, 'I shall have to deduct the value of two thousand pounds sterling, for which I have given my bond to Mr. Blenkinsop, the banker of N——, in order to get rid of the sheriff's officers at Osmanby. My mother,' continued I, with some bitterness of tone, 'has got but little in return for such unthrifty generosity! My father has died insolvent, and I—I—her only child—am a ruined man—a beggar for life!'

As painful thoughts of various descriptions crowded on my brain, I paced the room with rapid strides, and in uncontrollable agitation. All my worldly hopes seemed at an end. I thought of Mary Conyers, and how the previously existing obstacles to our union were thus expanded into what seemed an insurmountable barrier. Then came the sudden recollection—the keen self-reproach—that while my father—a father whom I had dearly loved, and who had been ever kind, indulgent, and generous to me—lay in the next room in his coffin—my mind was occupied with thoughts wholly distinct from those which should have been suggested by regret for his loss—that, instead of dwelling on the remembrance of his virtues and his affection, I was wholly engrossed by my own selfish interests and worldly projects; nay, that I was conscious of something like a feeling of resentment against his memory. Conscience-stricken I sat down, and, leaning on the table, covered my face with my hands.

‘My dear sir,’ said Scales, soothingly, and, for the moment, at least, misinterpreting my demeanour, ‘you must not take too gloomy a view of these affairs. Your case is certainly

a hard one, and I can fully enter into your feelings. It is but justice, however, to your lamented father to say that he was eagerly bent on repairing the injury he has unintentionally—indeed, I may say unconsciously—inflicted on you. Had his life been spared, he could and would have made arrangements, with the concurrence of your brother, to insure you a comfortable provision. Before he left town for Osmanby, now scarcely two months ago, he entered fully into the subject with me, and gave me instructions to prepare the necessary deeds, which, if executed by your brother and himself, would have secured you a charge of 25,000*l.* on the Osmanby Manor estate, after his decease. He had sounded your brother on the subject before his departure for Corfu, and received the assurance of his perfect willingness to co-operate in effecting this desirable result. Unfortunately, however, Sir Philip had felt a degree of awkwardness in laying all the details of the matter before the Colonel, and had imposed that duty on me. At his request I sent out, in the beginning of last month, a confidential and elaborate statement to Colonel Osmanby, explaining the unfortunate diminu-

tion of Lady Osmanby's trust property, sacrificed, as it has been, to Sir Philip's pecuniary necessities. When I drew up that statement, I had every reason to believe that, as we all hoped, Sir Philip might live for many years; and as there was no settlement executed on the marriage of Colonel and Mrs. Osmanby, Sir Philip was then in a position to give, and was prepared to give, a substantial equivalent—what, in short, we lawyers term a valuable consideration—for the Colonel's concurrence in barring the entail and re-settling the property so far as was necessary to create the charge in your favour. As matters then stood, if the Colonel had chanced to die before your father, not only Mrs. Osmanby, but the twin-daughters, would have been unprovided for. In exchange, however, for the posthumous benefit intended for you, Sir Philip proposed to join the Colonel in charging the estates with a jointure of 1,000*l.* per annum in favour of Mrs. Osmanby, to take effect at once, in the event of the Colonel's decease before his father, and to be increased to 2,000*l.* a-year on Sir Philip's own death, and also giving to the Colonel an immediate power of charging 20,000*l.* on the reversion, in favour

of his younger children, to take effect on the death of the survivor of Sir Philip and himself. All this, you see, would have been a fair and sensible arrangement. When Sir Philip called on me in chambers, the other day, his great anxiety was to know whether I had received an answer from the Colonel, acceding to these terms. Unluckily, I had had no letter, and I much fear that the annoyance and agitation caused by the idea that the Colonel might raise objections, or that, at any rate, there might not be time to complete the arrangement, had the effect of hastening the sad termination of Sir Philip's illness.'

'My poor dear father!' was all that I could say, as I felt the distressing consciousness of having judged him harshly, and, I much feared, ungratefully.

'Still you must feel, my dear sir,' continued Scales, 'that although the matter has unfortunately not been formally completed in Sir Philip's lifetime, Sir George, with full knowledge of the circumstances, so disastrous as they affect your interests, and aware that what I may really call your property has been absorbed to satisfy Sir Philip's debts, cannot fail to recognise the moral obligation incumbent on

him, to carry your father's wishes into effect. Sir George will have a clear 17,000*l.* a year.'

It is needless to say, that with my knowledge of George's character, I did not doubt his readiness to give effect to my father's plans, to the extent, at least, of securing such further provision for me as might enable me to retain, with comfort and credit, my position as an officer of the Guards, with the means of purchasing, from time to time, the necessary steps in the usual order of promotion. But what struck me most at the moment, in this statement of Mr. Scales, was the light it seemed to throw on that secret interview between George and my mother, which I have mentioned as taking place a few days before her death, under circumstances which I had felt to be alike perplexing and mortifying to myself. It was now clear that the mysterious communication withheld from me, and intrusted to him, related to my ruined prospects. She had, it was evident, made a dying appeal, on my behalf, to his fraternal feelings, in the hope that he might do something towards redressing the balance which, in her case, had been so unequally maintained between the conflicting claims of a wife's duty and a mother's love.

How many things had puzzled me, more or less, during the previous two years of which I was now able to fathom the mystery!—my mother's gradually increasing depression—her eagerness to dissuade my father from standing for the county—and, above all, her earnest and persevering efforts to bring about a marriage between Cecilia Grainger and me.

‘Well,’ said I, after a minute or two of silent reflection, ‘I have nothing for it but what many a better man has had to do under heavier reverses—to accept my position, and shape my future plans in accordance with my altered fortunes. But, before we drop this painful part of the subject, I should really like, my dear Mr. Scales, to have a little more distinct information as to the manner—to me perfectly unaccountable—in which my poor father has got rid of these thousands and tens of thousands which my mother's unreasoning affection has, it seems, enabled him to dispose of with so little benefit to himself, and a result so disastrous to me. How is it that, with an income of nearly 18,000*l.* a-year, a man who never touched a card or a dice-box, nor, as I verily believe, ever booked a bet on the turf since he came into the property, has been unable to live within

his means, and has got into such deplorable difficulties ?’

‘It was a noble property, no doubt,’ said Scales ; ‘but you must be well aware that things were always conducted on a very grand scale, both at Osmanby and in London. The worst of living habitually up to your income, or even nearly so, particularly in a certain position of life, is that, when heavy exceptional and unforeseen expenses arise, as they are sure to do at some time or another, you have no margin to meet them. I have no doubt you must have heard, though you may have forgotten it, that when you were quite an infant, the extensive stables and out-offices at Osmanby were accidentally burnt down, and a number of valuable horses destroyed by the conflagration. Through some unaccountable negligence, the buildings and everything they contained were uninsured. The premises were, however, as you may see, rebuilt on a very large scale, and in a highly ornamental style of architecture. What it cost Sir Philip to replace his stud, I cannot say ; but I know that the cost of the new stable-buildings, added to that of the spacious conservatory, which was erected in the same year, amounted to 7,000*l.*, and that,

in the exercise of her power of appointment, Lady Osmanby called on the trustees of her settlement for the sum of 5,000*l.*, which was, I conclude, applied towards payment of these expenses.'

'It seems, then,' said I, 'that the process of absorption began very early.'

'Yes, and was continued at intervals, to a more or less serious extent, on other occasions of a similar character. But the most fruitful source of mischief was that unlucky Llandyddlwm estate, which Sir Philip all along destined for you.'

'How could that be?' enquired I. 'There can have been no burning down or rebuilding there. I have often heard my father say that there was no mansion-house on the estate, and that it was nearly all grass land in the hands of two very wealthy tenant graziers, with scarcely anything in the way of farm buildings to keep up.'

'That is quite true. If Sir Philip had not gone below the surface, Llandyddlwm would never have given him any trouble. But did he never speak to you of the supposed discovery of valuable minerals under the estate?'

'Not that I can remember.'

‘Very likely not. It was, I am afraid, a sore subject. The fact is, however, that about ten years ago a sanguine adventurer—I have never been able quite to satisfy my own mind whether he was most knave or fool—contrived to persuade Sir Philip that coal was to be found in great abundance under one portion of the estate, and at a very small depth below the surface. The theory was that it was an offshoot of the valuable mines rented and worked by the Blenoscwd Coal Company, which lie at the other side of the ridge of hills that bounds the parish of Llandyddlwm on the north-east —— I forget what you call it.’

‘I don’t know the country,’ said I; ‘never mind the name, and spare me the scientific reasoning, however plausible; I am only interested in the result.’

‘The result was, that on the strength of a vast array of specious professional evidence, and an elaborate report, signed by an eminent geologist, a couple of civil engineers, and an experienced inspector of mines, by which it was clearly made to appear that the value of the property would be increased tenfold by the outlay of a few thousands at starting, Sir Philip, in an evil hour, sanctioned the hazard-

ous experiment. Shafts were sunk, costly steam-engines erected, and a large force of mining labour employed in the operation. They spoiled a few acres of the finest pasture land in the kingdom; they bored and excavated for about eighteen months without finding enough of what they sought to fill a coal-scuttle. At the end of two years the works had to be abandoned. In that comparatively short period Sir Philip had advanced, and the projectors expended, or partly expended and partly embezzled, a sum of near forty thousand pounds.'

'And the loss, I conclude, was borne by my mother's property?'

'To the extent of two-thirds at least. It was, I am bound to say, her ladyship's own deliberate act; and there was great allowance to be made for her. The matter, as it appeared on paper, seemed reduced to a certainty. Coal had unquestionably been found in various places, and very near the surface. It is my private belief that this phenomenon was fraudulently produced; that, in fact, the specimens found had been actually buried by the promoters, in order that they might be the subject of the pretended discoveries, and figure on

paper as conclusive evidence of the existence of the reported seam. Had the result borne out what appeared to be the reasonable hopes of all parties, Llandyddlwm would have been a princely inheritance. Lady Osmanby was well aware of Sir Philip's intention to leave it to you. Indeed, he had solemnly pledged himself to her to that effect. She had, therefore, strong grounds for believing that the money was laid out for your benefit.'

'She was not to blame,' said I, with a sigh.

'The estate,' continued Scales, 'was already in mortgage for a sum of 10,000*l.*, which, on coming into the Osmanby property, Sir Philip had raised in order to pay the debts of your grandfather, Sir Basil, whose affairs were also much involved at the time of his death. It was a noble and perfectly gratuitous act on the part of Sir Philip, who was not liable for these debts, either personally or in respect of his interest in the family estates. This charge is still in existence, and, in the course of these swindling mining operations, Sir Philip was obliged to create another incumbrance, by way of mortgage, for nearly the same amount. The rents have been little more than enough to keep down the interest on these two mortgages;

and as the value of land in that part of Monmouthshire has fallen since the date of the existing leases, which are nearly run out, I think that Llandyddlwm, if sold, will not realise much more than enough to pay off the incumbrances. I can supply you with further details of fresh and unforeseen embarrassments, in which Lady Osmanby has pursued the same system of self-sacrifice, in order to relieve the necessities of the moment; and you can well believe that her trust fund did not come unscathed out of last year's contest for the county. But you have probably heard enough to render the present unsatisfactory state of affairs quite intelligible.'

I had indeed, as Mr. Scales said, heard quite enough, and was glad to drop the conversation, and close the interview.

I will not ask the reader to follow me into the retirement of my own room, where I remained for several hours in silent communion with my own thoughts, which were, alas! but very indifferent company.

At length the struggle was over—the crisis of feeling past. I felt that I had regained sufficient composure to acquaint my sister with the result of my long conference with Mr.

Scales, and discuss with calmness the painful actualities of my position. I had, at least, the comfort of reflecting that neither Maud nor her children could be injuriously affected by the circumstances that had so unexpectedly come to my knowledge, and that the sympathy on which I could reckon from her warm and affectionate heart, would be unleavened by any sense of personal disappointment in connection with the state of my father's affairs. Aware, to some extent, of his difficulties, she had no expectations from his will. The sum secured by her marriage settlement was all that could be counted on. That was safe. *I* was the only victim.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH I DO MY BEST TO ACCEPT MY
POSITION.

SUCH was the unsatisfactory state of my father's affairs, that, after his remains had been consigned to the family vault at Osmanby, and his will duly proved at Doctors' Commons, Mr. Scales, as the executor and trustee, found it necessary to seek without delay the protection and guidance of the Court of Chancery, in the discharge of his duties.

It did not much tend to restore my equanimity, when I found that I was called upon, in my shadowy character of devisee of Llandyddllwm, to figure as a defendant in a suit, instituted on behalf of my father's creditors, for the administration of his estate.

With that salutary horror of Chancery, its delays and expenses, which has long pervaded the British mind in connection with the awful traditions of Lord Eldon's protracted tenure

of the Great Seal, my first anxiety was to escape from what, to my unprofessional eyes, appeared a position of great peril — by formally renouncing all claim on my father's estate, and all interest under his will. I therefore requested Mr. Scales to lose no time in preparing some legal instrument effectual for that purpose, which I might execute at once, and thereby, as I hoped, put an end to the matter as far as I was concerned.

To this, however, Mr. Scales would by no means consent. He solemnly assured me — but had great difficulty in inducing me to believe — that I ran no personal risk of costs, which would all come out of the estate, and reminded me that, in respect of my liability to Mr. Blenkinsop, which I was about to discharge by the sale of three-sevenths of the miserable remnant of my mother's trust-moneys—viz., the 5,000*l.* consols, which had been just transferred into my name—I was in the position of a creditor as against my father's estate, and would come in for a rateable share of what might be divisible among the creditors by simple contract, even if the peculiar circumstances of the transaction should not entitle me to rank—as he thought they would

—as a specialty creditor against Sir Philip's estate, and, as such, secure my being paid in full, the assets being clearly more than sufficient to pay that class of debts.

'What may be my legal rights in the matter I know not,' said I, 'but this I do know—that I will never consent to enforce them as long as any one of my father's debts remains unpaid.'

'Pardon me,' said Scales, 'but this is simply Quixotic. Your debt is a perfectly just and equitable claim. Suppose this judgment of Mr. Blenkinsop's had remained unsatisfied at Sir Philip's death, and you had incurred no liability in respect of it, you certainly would not have thought it necessary to pay this particular debt more than any other. You are no more called upon to sacrifice this sum, or any portion of it that you can recover, than you are to spend the last shilling of Lady Osmanby's trust-money in discharge of Sir Philip's debts.'

'In the case you put,' rejoined I, standing apart, as I should do, from any question affecting my father's solvency, and deriving no benefit from the family estates, I should not certainly consider myself bound in honour

or in conscience to reduce myself to beggary for such a purpose. But it is one thing to remain passive in such a condition of affairs, and another to act hostilely against his estate in order to enforce, to the detriment of his general creditors, a claim which I should never have actively urged against himself in his lifetime. When I took upon myself this liability, I was fully prepared for the contingency of being obliged to bear the loss. It is true that I then believed myself well able to bear it ; and I have since discovered my mistake. This, however, can make no difference in my estimate of duty. If it should unfortunately happen that the creditors, on whose forbearance he had no moral claim, cannot be paid in full out of his estate, the deficiency shall not be increased by any act of mine. I suppose I should, as residuary legatee, be entitled to anything that remained after payment of his debts?’

‘ Clearly,’ said Scales, ‘ but there is, unluckily, no chance of any such surplus. Irrespective of the Llandyddlwm mortgages, the debts, without including your claim, amount to something like 10,000*l.*, and I have sworn the personal property, for the purposes of

probate, under 8,000*l.* As nearly one-half of these debts are of a class which affects the real estate of a deceased debtor,* the sale of Llandyddlwm is inevitable; and unless that estate should realise a considerable sum beyond the amount of the encumbrances—of which I have very little hope—the simple contract creditors will not be paid in full.’

‘This is a sad prospect,’ said I; ‘but if I know my brother, he is not the man to overlook the moral claim which must be considered to affect the inheritor of the family estates under such circumstances.’

‘*Your* claim on Sir George is by far the strongest,’ said Scales. ‘But it is very singular that I have received no answer to my letter.’

‘It is not less singular,’ said I; ‘that the letter I wrote to him announcing my poor father’s death has not yet been acknowledged. In the ordinary course of post, I ought to have heard by last week’s mail. There is,

* Should any acute and learned reader here fancy that he has caught Mr. Scales tripping in his law, he will bear in mind that this conversation took place in the early part of the year 1833, and consequently, before the passing of the Act 3 and 4 Will. IV. c. 104.

however, another packet due to-morrow, or the day after, and I am not without anxiety about the news it may bring.'

'It may perhaps bring Sir George himself,' observed Scales; 'and that will be the best thing that can happen.'

The mail-packet from Corfu arrived in due course. It did not bring my brother; but it brought letters from Joséphine and the staff-surgeon which justified my forebodings of evil, and filled the measure of my unhappiness. About a week before the arrival of the letter addressed to him by Mr. Scales, and containing the details of the proposed family arrangement, George had been thrown from his horse, in consequence of the animal having accidentally stepped into a hole in the turf across which he was cantering at a brisk pace. George's head had come into contact with the ground as he fell, and he had been stunned for a few seconds. But there was no outward appearance of injury beyond a slight scratch or two; and having rapidly recovered his consciousness, he was able to ride home without difficulty or inconvenience.

For two or three days he felt no ill effects from the accident, except a little soreness and

stiffness in the back ; but about the fourth or fifth day, violent pains in his head and a general difficulty in moving his limbs obliged him to seek surgical advice. These disagreeable symptoms, which were from the first pronounced to be very serious, rapidly increased, and when the letters from England arrived he was in a state which made it impossible for those about him to bring any matter of business to his notice.

It was not to be expected that, under these distressing circumstances, Mrs. Osmanby, whose time was fully occupied by close attendance on her husband, should think it necessary to enter into a correspondence with the family solicitor, had she even understood the purport of his communication. On the other hand, as she, from day to day, indulged a hope that George's alarming symptoms would subside, she was in no hurry to aggravate the depression under which she knew Sir Philip to be labouring by reporting the sad mischance which had befallen her husband, before she was, as she hoped to be, able to add that he was going on favourably.

Time wore on, but no amendment was perceptible. His medical attendants did not,

indeed, consider him to be in imminent danger, and held out hopes of his ultimate recovery. But the effects of the shock on his mental powers and nervous system became daily more conspicuous. Before the arrival of my letter announcing the death of Sir Philip, George had gradually sunk into a semi-lethargic condition, from which he was roused only by the violent paroxysms of pain in the head and limbs, which recurred at intervals. His condition could not be described as one of absolute imbecility, but there seemed too much reason to apprehend that it might gradually assume that character. The medical authorities pronounced that the brain was partially affected. Perfect tranquillity, and the absence of all excitement, were, they said, essential to his chances of recovery; and, at the best, it would be a work of time.

This was the substance of what reached me through poor Joséphine's all but heart-broken despatch, corroborated by a short letter from the chief officer of the medical staff, who had kindly volunteered, for my information, a more technical and, of course, less intelligible account of the case. It appeared that George had been, with all due precaution, apprised of

Sir Philip's death, and that he was sufficiently capable of apprehending the consequent change in his position to acquiesce, on that ground, in the suggestion that it would be desirable for him to resign his Staff appointment, and return to England as soon as the state of his health would admit of his undertaking the voyage—of which, however, there seemed no immediate prospect.

It is superfluous to say how much this disastrous news enhanced the feelings of distress and despondency against which I was manfully struggling. In the apparent wreck of my fortune, George's affection and counsel had seemed my surest refuge from the troubles that surrounded me. Not, indeed, that I had reckoned on taxing his liberality to the extent of allowing him to carry into full effect, and at his own expense, the beneficial arrangement by which my father had sought to indemnify me, to some extent, for the loss of my mother's fortune; but as I felt sure that a portion, at least, of the sacrifices exacted from her conjugal love or duty had been made in consideration of a distinct pledge that my interests should be protected, by means of a re-settlement of the estates, and I was not less

firmly convinced that her death-bed communication with George had for its object to secure his aid for that purpose, I had every reason to believe that he would be not only ready but eager to afford me the moderate amount of assistance that I proposed to seek at his hands.

This, my last hope, was now at an end. It was clear that however far removed his mental state might be from actual imbecility, he was in no condition to be reminded of pledges that he was not legally bound to redeem; nor could I reconcile it to my conscience to urge any claim upon his brotherly affection when, on his part, the exercise of a deliberate judgment in the matter seemed out of the question.

The want of his personal sympathy in my adversity was no less a source of bitter disappointment. If my worldly circumstances needed the aid of his purse, the support of his sound judgment and kind heart seemed equally necessary to sustain my wavering resolves and sinking spirits. I had many intimate acquaintances—men who, in the ordinary language of the world, are described as friends—some of them not undeserving of that epithet, as far as sincere good will and kindly feelings were

concerned; but, out of my own family circle, I had but one real friend, according to my rather high estimate of what that term implied, and he—Conyers—was at the other end of the globe.

True, I had, as the reader has seen, a very sensible and rather sympathetic attorney, who did his best to direct and cheer me when I had recourse to him for advice. But, in so disastrous a crisis, a ruined man requires a more thoroughly genial sympathy than that which, however sincere, is eventually to be represented in a bill of costs.

From one quarter, indeed, I received a species of condolence so highly characteristic of the individual by whom it was administered, that I cannot pass it over in silence. Lady Tarleton was absent from England at the time of my father's death, having passed the winter at Rome, whither she had betaken herself in company with another pious and proselytising dowager, not, as it was supposed, without some ulterior views in reference to the conversion—wholesale or retail—of the College of Cardinals. I had naturally left to my sister the task of communicating the melancholy event to the aunt by whom she had been brought up; and I had as naturally concluded

that all her Ladyship had to say on the subject would be addressed to Lady Belturbet, through whose medium I should have been quite content to receive the assurance of my good aunt's sympathy, which I estimated at its full value. As the Belturbets had returned to Ireland immediately after the funeral, I took it for granted that the answer to Maud's letter was addressed to her at Shanbanagher, and that I should be spared all share of a correspondence for which I had little inclination.

It was, therefore, with some surprise that, about six weeks after my father's death, I received a letter from my aunt, dated Florence, couched in terms of very lugubrious condolence, and well garnished with such flowers of religious rhetoric as generally adorn the homilies of that school of piety now represented by Exeter Hall. After a decorous display of her sisterly regard for the deceased, seasoned by a dark phrase or two, which betrayed, with sufficient transparency, her charitable misgivings as to his condition in the next world, she continued as follows:—

‘I need not say, my dear nephew, how grieved I have been to learn that you are left

without any pecuniary means for the future. I may well say so, as I take it for granted that, with the ruinously expensive habits in which you have been encouraged by both your parents, your debts must be sufficient to absorb the miserable remnant of your poor mother's fortune which is now at your disposal. What an aggravation of your disappointment it must be to reflect that she has sacrificed the worldly welfare of her only child to the rapacity of her Popish clergy, and that you have been robbed of your inheritance by those false teachers to whose unholy ministry you have unfortunately been taught to bow with such blind submission! Surely, surely, my dear Gerald, this sad discovery will go far to remove the veil from your eyes, and prove to you that, in clinging to the carnal and unscriptural faith in which you have been brought up, you are indeed relying on a broken reed! Should this blessed change be the result of your present affliction, you will then indeed experience the sweet uses of adversity—and no one will more sincerely rejoice than your affectionate aunt,

‘CAROLINE TARLETON.

‘P.S.—You will, of course, be obliged to sell your commission in the Guards. But I dare say dear George, who has remained faithful to the political as well as religious principles of his family, will have interest enough to obtain for you some small public employment in one of the colonies.’

This letter had a very contrary effect to that which the writer probably anticipated; for it afforded me what I had not enjoyed for several months—viz., a hearty laugh.

It was certainly artistically framed for the purposes of annoyance, and exhibited great apparent skill in the detection or production of what is vulgarly called a ‘raw.’ But as far as the question of my prospects was involved, it arrived too late. My moral epidermis had become case-hardened against the effect of the species of blister which my aunt intended to apply. I had already looked my position in the face, and determined on the course it behoved me to adopt under the adverse circumstances of the moment. With a grade in the Guards equivalent to that of Regimental Captain in the line, I felt that I should be acting with unwise precipitancy in

at once selling out of the army. It was clear, however, that the income of 3,000*l.* consols, viz., 90*l.* per annum, was inadequate to the reasonable necessities of a subaltern in the Guards, who had nothing else to depend on but his pay—that, with such limited means, regimental promotion in the Guards, involving as it did an enormous outlay in the purchase of the next step in rank, would be out of the question.

I had therefore taken measures to effect an exchange into the line; and a satisfactory interview at the Horse Guards with the military secretary—that gallant soldier, excellent man of business, and most courteous of high-bred gentlemen, the late Lord Raglan, then Lord Fitzroy Somerset—had assured me of the speedy success of my application. My aunt's kind hint about a small colonial appointment, intended, no doubt, to suggest pleasing visions of official life in Sierra Leone, or some equally engaging climate, was therefore thrown away upon me. Not more effective was her intended hit about the supposed amount of my debts. Except my liability to Mr. Blenkinsop, which I discharged within a week after my mother's consols had been transferred into my

name, the sums owing by me were of very trifling amount, and such as the money produced by the sale of my cab, dog-cart, and horses was far more than sufficient to pay.

As to the mode in which my poor mother's money had been got rid of, the reader does not require to be told that, if considered as applied '*in pios usus*,' it can be so only in reference to those high-pitched theories of conjugal duty, fidelity, and devotion, from the discredit of which the edifying jurisdiction of Sir Cresswell Cresswell will soon effectually rescue the national character. So *that* barrel also had missed fire.

I lost no time in acknowledging my aunt's letter by the following laconic epistle; in which, as the reader will see, I endeavoured to accommodate my usually mundane style to her ostentatiously Scriptural predilections:—

'Dear Aunt,—Thanks for your condolences. You will be much relieved to learn that I do not owe a sixpence, and that, small as is the amount of property which I inherit, I shall not be under the necessity of retiring from the army.

'It will also be consolatory to you to know

that you have been entirely misinformed as to the disposal of my mother's fortune, and that she has not, as you suppose, impoverished me to enrich the Church. She has, in dealing with her money, acted on strictly Scriptural principles; obeying the precept of St. Paul (Eph. iv. 32), and exemplifying the words of Solomon (Prov. xxxi. 11, 12). The funds, which would otherwise have been mine, have all gone to supply my father's necessities. Should you feel any doubt of the fact, the family solicitor, Mr. Scales, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, will, I have no doubt, at any time satisfy your mind on this point, at a cost to yourself not exceeding thirteen and four-pence. I have no complaint to make on the subject; and can only hope that I may one day be so fortunate as to find a wife with an equally strong sense of her Christian duties.

‘Your affectionate Nephew,

‘G. F. OSMANBY.’

CHAPTER XVI.

I SEEK AN INTERVIEW WITH MARY CONYERS.

ALTHOUGH I thus endeavoured to put the best face on the matter with one whom I suspected of deriving some enjoyment from my discomfiture, I was by no means in an enviable frame of mind. It was, indeed, chiefly—I might almost say solely, as it affected my chances of making Mary Conyers my wife—that I felt the full bitterness of the change in my prospects.

I had, it is true, thought myself bound in honour to release her from the trammels of an implied engagement, when, to my mortification, I had discovered the impossibility of at once presenting myself to her father as a suitor for her hand; but I had never doubted for a moment that I should be able, at no distant day, to secure the consent of my own parents to the project nearest my heart, and, as a necessary consequence, obtain from my father's

liberality a suitable provision for my reasonable wants, as a married man, during his life. I had taken it equally for granted that, in the event of his death in my mother's lifetime, the very handsome jointure which I knew to be charged on the Osmanby estates, for her benefit, would enable her to continue to me the same allowance out of the income of that fortune which, as I had been led to believe, would inevitably be mine at her decease.

Since Hugh's departure for India I had had no positive information as to the state of Mary's feelings in my regard; but I had, as the reader is aware, had some negative evidence that seemed to justify a favourable conjecture on the subject, the effect of which was not wholly rebutted by her incomprehensible demeanour during the short interview, if I can so term it, which took place between us at the door of Harding's shop. Perplexing as was the appearance of anger which she exhibited on that occasion, I could not but ascribe it to some extraordinary misapprehension of my conduct towards herself; and it was at least clear that the strong emotion she betrayed was incompatible with a state of utter indifference to my affection.

There was, therefore, up to the time of my father's death, nothing in my position, as I understood it, to suggest a feeling of despondency as to the ultimate fate of my hopes; and although, on the occurrence of that event, I was at first too much engrossed by the painful reflections inseparable from the occasion to bestow much thought on the effect it would have on my own prospects, I had assumed, as a matter of course, that it had placed me in circumstances of pecuniary independence; and in connection with this implicit belief, the remembrance of Mary had crossed my mind at intervals as a ray of light, occasionally cheering the gloom of the moment.

But now all was changed. In the most sanguine view of my prospects, many long years must elapse before I could be in a position entitling me to bring my pretensions under the notice of Mary's father; nor could I, in fairness, seek to entangle her in an engagement the fulfilment of which must be indefinitely postponed. She was, I had good reason to believe, all but portionless. But, on the other hand, she was so placed in society, that she could not fail to attract numerous admirers, to whom her want of money would

be matter of total indifference; while her daily experience of life necessarily included the benefit of many expensive luxuries which would probably become essential to her comfort, and of which she could secure the permanent enjoyment only by making what the world calls 'a good match.'

In the meantime, although I had the evidence of my own eyes, in support of the fact of her return to England, I remained totally in the dark as to her present residence and future plans, until, towards the end of the month of April, a paragraph in one of the morning papers announced the arrival in Lower Grosvenor Street of the Dowager Countess of Chedworth and Miss Conyers.

An entry in the 'Gazette,' about ten days previously, had notified my exchange from the Grenadier Guards into the —th Regiment of Foot, then stationed at Kingston, Jamaica. A few weeks only would intervene before I should have to embark for the West Indies. In the meantime, I was under orders to join the *dépôt* of my new regiment at Chatham, and had only three or four days to remain in town before I reported myself to the authorities of that dreary garrison.

Come what might, I was resolved that I would not leave England without obtaining from Mary's own lips an explanation of her strange demeanour towards me. What other definite object or hope I had in seeking an interview, which, in any event, could scarcely leave me less wretched than it would find me, I did not very distinctly make out to my own satisfaction. But if my resolve should not approve itself to the severe logical judgment of the reader, I can only appeal to the tribunal of his feelings and personal experience, which will probably suggest a more lenient view of the case.

How to effect my object was the point for consideration. There was no time, and I had little inclination for diplomacy ; so I determined to adopt the simplest course that the circumstances would admit. It proved to be not less judicious in fact than it was correct in principle.

I could not doubt that Lady Chedworth had carried her point of obtaining the sole care and charge of Mary, during Sir Robert's absence in India, and that, consequently, that discreet dowager was the highest constitutional authority at that moment in England, before

whom any question of social propriety, affecting Mary's relations with me, could be regularly brought.

I remembered, and perhaps the reader has not forgotten, that I had been betrayed into making Lady Chedworth the confidant of my feelings, on the day when she so acutely penetrated the motive of my sudden display of sympathy for the wrongs of Poland, and that she had behaved to me, on the occasion, with characteristic frankness, being half inclined to take a good-natured interest in the success of my hopes. I well knew, indeed, that, however favourably she might have estimated my pretensions at that time, my recent reverse of fortune afforded her good grounds for a change of opinion on the subject, and that I could not expect from her, in her character of chaperon, any encouragement under the altered circumstances of the case. But I resolved to make an appeal to her kindness of heart—an appeal *in misericordiam*—for the opportunity of seeing Mary once—probably for the last time as Mary Conyers—before I left England, perhaps for ever.

In accordance with this resolution, I wrote to Lady Chedworth in the following terms :—

‘ Dear Lady Chedworth,— You have, I take it for granted, heard of my domestic losses. You have probably also heard how seriously they have affected my present position and future prospects. I have exchanged from the Guards into the Line, and in a very few weeks I shall embark to join the — Regiment in Jamaica.

‘ I have always experienced much kindness from your ladyship, and I do not forget that you once listened, not without some appearance of sympathy, to a tale of foolish hopes, with which, in brighter days, I was indiscreet enough to trouble you, on the subject of one whose merits I know you fondly appreciate, and who is now under your care. Those hopes which, even at that time, might be thought presumptuous, would now be insane. I am no longer in a position to urge a suit which, under present circumstances, you cannot, I am well aware, be expected to countenance in any way; and in asking you to sanction my earnest request to be allowed a few minutes’ conversation with Miss Conyers under your roof, and, if you think it absolutely necessary, in your presence, I most solemnly disclaim all intention of combating the decision at which she

had arrived about eighteen months back, and to which I cannot doubt that she still adheres. *She* will be at no loss to understand the grounds on which I solicit this favour; and I *think* she will be willing to concede it to me as a matter of simple justice.

‘I have thought it at once more respectful to your ladyship, and more considerate towards Miss Conyers herself, to prefer this request through you.

‘I am under orders for Chatham at the beginning of next week; and the few intervening days are all that I can reckon on with certainty as being at my disposal in London before I leave England.—Believe me, my dear Lady Chedworth, with great respect,

‘Your obliged and faithful servant,

‘G. F. OSMANBY.’

The lapse of a very few hours brought me the following reply:—

‘Lower Grosvenor Street, Thursday.

‘Dear Captain Osmanby,—I have indeed been very sorry to hear of your misfortunes, and beg to offer my condolences accordingly.

‘Many people might say that I was not very discreet in entertaining your request.

But I like your straightforward proceeding, and have every confidence in *your word*. I have therefore left the decision of the point to Mary, and I find it is her wish to see you, and to see you without the presence of any third person.

‘If you call in Grosvenor Street to-morrow about twelve, you will be admitted. I am not sufficiently in Mary’s confidence to know whether she has to give or to receive explanations in the proposed interview; but I trust to your good sense and good feeling not to prolong it unnecessarily.

‘Believe me, with great regard,

‘Yours very truly,

‘ISABELLA CHEDWORTH.’

Need I say that I was punctual in keeping the appointment? I was of course not so indiscreet as to proclaim to Lady Chedworth’s household the object of my visit, by asking for Miss Conyers. Having been informed that her ladyship was at home, I was ushered into the principal drawing-room, where I found the dowager alone.

She received me with great cordiality. ‘I cannot tell you,’ said she, after the first greet-

ing, 'how vexed I have been to hear of all that has happened. You know I am a very blunt person, and no *faiseuse de phrases*; but you have my sincere sympathy for the past and my hearty good wishes for the future. I was very fond of your poor dear mother, and cannot imagine how she, being a sensible woman as she was, can have allowed the priests to get hold of all her money.'

'My dear Lady Chedworth,' said I, 'you give me credit, I am sure, for truthfulness and candour.'

'Well, I do,' said she.

'Then you will believe me when I assure you, on my word as a gentleman, that the rumour to which you refer is utterly without foundation. But on this point, and at such a moment, you will, I know, forgive me for not entering into long details, which I have no right to inflict upon you.'

'At all events,' said she, 'I do not expect you to lose your time in satisfying my curiosity, when you have come here for a very different purpose. I will leave you for the present; and Mary will be with you immediately. I do not wish exactly to *time* you in your interview with her; but for your own sake, as well as

for hers, make as short work of it as you can. And now, as very possibly I may not see you again before you leave England, I will say good bye, and God bless you !'

So saying, she again shook me cordially by the hand, and left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARY.

BUT a few moments elapsed—moments of agitating suspense to me—when the door reopened, and Mary made her appearance.

She advanced slowly towards me, and held out her hand. I took it in silence. It was cold as marble. Her cheek was deadly pale, her general aspect grave and sad. But her sweet eyes met mine with that frank and truthful look which, from the first, had exercised such a fascination over me.

It was some little time before I could control my agitation sufficiently to speak. She seemed hardly more composed; but at length, gently disengaging her hand from the grasp in which I had retained it, she took her seat on a sofa, and motioned me, in silence, to a chair on the opposite side of the fire-place.

‘Mary,’ said I, after another short pause, ‘you know all that has happened?’

She could not, apparently, trust herself to speak, but bowed her head in token of acquiescence.

‘You have heard,’ continued I, ‘that I am an utterly ruined man — all but a beggar — and that I must expect nothing better than to be an exile for years?’

She was still silent; but she averted her head, as, in spite of an evident struggle to restrain it, a tear started to her eye, and trickled slowly down her cheek.

‘I hope I need not assure you, Mary,’ continued I, ‘that when I was presumptuous enough to address you in the language of affection, I was utterly unprepared for what has befallen me—that I was the dupe of my own false position.’

‘Oh! Gerald,’ said Mary, half sobbing, as she spoke, ‘you cannot think that I need these assurances. It is very—very hard upon you.’

‘It is a sore and bitter trial, Mary,’ said I, ‘to be forced to abandon the only hope that gave a value to life. But we must submit, without murmuring, to what Providence ordains. In my altered fortunes, I should have no fair pretext for intruding on you,

if I came for no other purpose than to distress your good nature, and wring my own heart, by bidding you farewell. But you must be well aware of the motive which has led me to solicit this interview.'

'I think . . . that is, I suppose,' said Mary, with hesitation and embarrassment, 'perhaps . . . ' and she again paused.

'You can be in no doubt, Mary,' said I. 'We have met once, and but once, since your return from the Cape. You cannot have forgotten it.'

'I have not,' answered she, gently and sadly.

'Well, Mary, you can as little have forgotten the chilling coldness with which you received my greeting on that occasion—the marked displeasure you exhibited towards me. Conscious as I am that no thought, word, or action of mine, since your departure from England, had afforded you just grounds of offence, I feel convinced that, in giving me so cruel a repulse, you were acting under some misapprehension, of what nature I am unable to guess. I must, I know, submit to the crushing of my fondest hopes. Circumstanced as I am, I cannot—I dare not—seek to alter

the views you once expressed to me in writing on the subject nearest to my heart. I must leave England with the sad conviction that, if we ever meet again, I shall have to meet you as the wife of some more fortunate—I dare say more deserving man. This is bitterness enough—it is very hard to bear. But I *cannot* leave England with the certainty of having incurred your anger, and without doing my best to discover what I have done to forfeit your esteem, and that friendly regard which I thought you would, in any event, retain for me.'

'Do not speak in this way,' said Mary, with a fresh burst of tears; 'it is very cruel. You know you have not forfeited my regard — my esteem.'

'Thank you a thousand times, Mary, for saying that. It is the only comfort that will remain to me. But let me implore you not to leave me in ignorance of the real cause of that change of demeanour towards me, which has so much aggravated my unhappiness.'

'Do not be too hard upon me, Gerald,' said Mary. 'You know I saw you only for a moment. I was taken by surprise — bewil-

dered; I had no time to reflect or collect my thoughts.'

'Mary, you are of too frank a nature to deny that your reception of me was occasioned by some feeling very distinct from mere surprise, however unexpected my appearance may have been. Surely you will not refuse to tell me in what that feeling originated?'

'It is unnecessary to recur to it,' said Mary, with increasing embarrassment. 'It was—it was a mistake.'

'A mistake!'

'Yes. I had been misinformed—that is, I was under a wrong impression.'

'On what subject, Mary? Surely no one could have sought to prejudice you against me. What had you heard?'

'I had heard nothing to your discredit. It was a mere misapprehension on my part. Had it been the fact, I did not mean—I had no right to blame you; but, from allusions that I had heard, I was led to believe that—that—'

She paused in great agitation, and blushed deeply.

'Oh, Mary, I entreat you to terminate this

suspense. What is it that you were led to believe?’

‘That you were MARRIED!’

‘Married!’ exclaimed I, starting up in astonishment, mixed with an undefined sense of hope—a sudden rush of joyful feeling to my heart; ‘married! who could have told you so?’

‘Nobody had told me so. But when at the Cape, we heard that you were engaged to that—that Miss Grainger.’

‘Good heavens! how could so absurd a report have reached you out there? And what could have induced you to believe it? Surely Hugh must have known better?’

‘Hugh was very unwilling to believe it. But your omitting to write in answer to the letter in which he had alluded to the rumour, as he assured me, seemed like confirmation.’

‘His letter contained no intelligible allusion to the subject, although there was a mysterious hint which I was at a loss to interpret. So far from omitting to write, I answered his letter by the very first ship. But I fear it never reached his hands, as the vessel was wrecked off St. Helena and the mails were lost. But who was your informant?’

‘We met one day at the Government House an Indian officer, a Scotch baronet, who had been home on furlough, and was on his way to rejoin his regiment at Madras.’

‘What!’ said I, as a flash of light crossed my mind; ‘a carrotty-headed, spindle-shanked, raw-boned gawky of a fellow, calling himself Sir Kenneth McCombie?’

‘It was a name something like that,’ said Mary, ‘and I think he *had* reddish hair. I did not much notice his appearance. But Hugh happened to mention your name in conversation, as that of a friend and brother guardsman; and Sir Kenneth then told us that he had met you at Wiesbaden the previous autumn, and that it was quite an understood thing that you were engaged to be married to an immensely rich heiress of the name of Grainger—a daughter of Lady Bulstrode; that you were always seen by her side, and that the day before he left you had fought a duel with a Russian prince on her account.’

‘It is quite true, Mary, that from various causes, and without any premeditation on my part, I was very much in the society of Lady Bulstrode and Miss Grainger during the few weeks I passed at Wiesbaden the autumn be-

fore last. It is also true that a ruined gambler, known as Prince Alexis Blominosoff, who was very anxious to ingratiate himself with the great English heiress, forced a quarrel on me, which, at one moment, seemed likely to end in a duel. But the dispute, such as it was, had no ostensible reference to Miss Grainger, whose name was not even mentioned. As to the footing on which she and I were together, I cannot better explain it than by telling you that, before I met her at Wiesbaden, she had, with characteristic acuteness, discovered the secret of my attachment to you, and that she was the ever-sympathising depository of my hopes and fears on the subject. If I took pleasure in her society, Mary, it was because to her I could open my heart about you, and because, when I did so, her kind and womanly spirit was ever prompt to suggest encouraging views of the future, and to deride, as unworthy, the fears I could not avoid expressing lest absence should have the effect of completely destroying that—that bias in my favour which, from the terms of your letter, I had already reason to believe so much weakened.'

'It seems,' said Mary, sadly and half

reproachfully, 'that, though a stranger to me, she judged me more correctly than you did.'

'What you heard from Sir Kenneth,' continued I, 'was partly, no doubt, the result of *pique* against her, as he, too, was certainly on the list of unsuccessful candidates for her favour. But a very little trouble in the way of enquiry about her, before he sailed on his return to India, might have saved him from the absurdity of retailing this foolish and mischievous gossip. Three months after her return from Wiesbaden, Cecilia Grainger carried into effect her resolution—with which I had long been fully acquainted—of entering her noviciate at the Convent of Princethorpe, preparatory to taking the veil.'

'I am aware of that,' said Mary; 'and, strangely enough, it was from details connected with that very proceeding, that I received what appeared to me full confirmation of the report I had heard at Cape Town.'

'How could that possibly be?' enquired I, in thorough amazement.

'You shall hear. You already know, probably, from your correspondence with Hugh, that Papa was more surprised than pleased to find that I had accompanied my brother on his

voyage from England. It did not suit his views that I should proceed with them to India; and as the time approached when he would be in a position to resume his command at —, with the sanction of the medical authorities, he became very anxious to send me back to England by the earliest opportunity. He therefore gladly availed himself of Sir Henry and Lady Durnford's kind offer to take charge of me on the voyage home, they being about to leave the colony on Sir Henry's retirement from the bench. I accordingly embarked with them for England, a few weeks before the time fixed for Papa's return to India. We arrived in London about a fortnight after the day on which Cecilia Grainger, as I have since ascertained, went through the ceremony of taking the white veil—I think that is what they call it—which I am told is a necessary preliminary to taking the irrevocable engagement, and assuming the black veil a year later.'

'I believe that is the usual course,' said I. 'But I had not heard of the ceremony having been performed in Cecilia Grainger's case. It is more than six months, indeed, since I last heard her name mentioned.'

‘Perhaps,’ said Mary, ‘I am better acquainted than you are with her present circumstances. But to resume my story. I remained with Sir Henry and Lady Durnford for about three weeks after our arrival in London—in fact, until I joined dear Lady Chedworth at Bramcote, in accordance with what had been arranged between Papa and her. It was during that period that I was startled one day by your sudden appearance at the door of the carriage in which I was waiting for Lady Durnford, who was in Harding’s shop.’

‘How could my appearance on guard in Pall Mall be a matter of surprise to you?’

‘It was matter of bewilderment; for I had, but the day previously, been led to believe that you were absent from London on your wedding excursion.’

‘My wedding excursion! O Mary! who could have imposed on you so grossly?’

‘Nobody. It was my own mistake. Lady Durnford, who is an excellent person, and had been as kind as possible to me on the voyage home, had asked me to accompany her in a morning visit to two elderly maiden sisters of the name of Disbrowe—old and

intimate friends of hers—living in Great Stanhope Street. While we were sitting with these ladies, who were delighted to see her after her long absence from England, Lady Bulstrode was announced; and, on her entrance, Lady Durnford was about to take leave, when the elder Miss Disbrowe, with whom she was deep in the discussion of matters of interest, entreated her not to go. She accordingly resumed her seat, and her conversation with Miss Disbrowe, who, after the first cordial greeting, left Lady Bulstrode to the attentions of her sister. I was therefore left rather to myself, and was so circumstanced that I could not avoid hearing a great deal of what passed between the two latter ladies. I knew Lady Bulstrode by sight; and her name and position were, I need not tell you, quite familiar to me. But she had not, I am sure, the least idea who I was; and looking no doubt on Lady Durnford and myself as obscure strangers, so far removed from the sphere of her own set that their presence needed not to be any restraint upon her, she carried on her half-confidential talk with Miss Sophy Disbrowe in a tone of voice quite incompatible with the notion of secrecy or reserve. My

attention was first attracted by the eager enquiry addressed to her by Miss Sophy Disbrowe: "*Well, my dear Lady Bulstrode, how did the ceremony go off? and how did poor dear Cecilia go through it?*" "*Oh, my dear,*" was the answer, "*it all went off very well—at least, as well as that sort of thing ever does, you know—and Cissy bore up admirably. I don't think I ever saw her look so well in my life. She was quite collected, and gave out the responses very distinctly.*" "*I suppose she was beautifully dressed?*" said Miss Disbrowe. "*Yes,*" said Lady Bulstrode. "*Maredan had carte blanche;*" and then followed what appeared to me an unmistakable description of a bridal dress—Brussels lace veil, lovely wreath, and so on. Then came such observations as "*Well, I hope you are reconciled to it?*" and the answer: "*I must make the best of it, my dear creature. I confess I had other views for her; but she was her own mistress, and has a right to be happy her own way.*" "*But you think she will be happy?*" "*I have every reason to believe it. She writes in excellent spirits. I heard from her this morning.*" Then, after some observations on both sides, in rather a lower key, to which I tried not to listen, and which I contrived

not to hear, Lady Bulstrode again startled me by observing, with a sigh, "*Yes, there is no doubt of it. That unfortunate visit to Wiesbaden brought matters to a crisis. She was so much overcome by the idea of Captain Osmanby having risked his life, and, as she said, his soul, in a quarrel which she knew was traceable to her rejection of that dreadful Russian adventurer. The thing took hold of her imagination, and strengthened the peculiar bias already existing. I own it was very thoughtless of me to allow of her being so constantly in Captain Osmanby's company. I had no idea things would have taken that turn. Between ourselves, I wish she had never seen him; but there is no help for it now. Mind! I do n't blame HIM. His conduct was perfectly natural and straightforward throughout. But, as I have said, that was an unlucky journey to Wiesbaden.*" Just about this point of the conversation Lady Durnford rose to take leave, and I heard no more. Do you—can you blame me, if I assumed, as a matter of certainty, from this singular combination of details, appearing, as they did to me, wholly unambiguous, that Cecilia Grainger was a bride on her wedding tour, and that Gerald Osmanby was the bridegroom?

‘It would have been a fair inference,’ said I, ‘if Hugh had not reported to you the last words I said to him in our parting interview.’

‘He *did* report them,’ said Mary, and she blushed deeply as she spoke. ‘But I have not quite finished my story. You may easily imagine that I made no remark to Lady Durnford on the subject of what I had heard. I knew she had no acquaintance with any of the parties concerned, and—and I was not anxious to exhibit any particular interest in the matter. It was under the erroneous impression for which I have accounted that I saw and started at your sudden approach on the following day. You know that I had not time either to seek or give any explanation; but no sooner had we driven off than it flashed across my mind that, if Miss Grainger was on her wedding trip, you, as her husband, could hardly be on guard at St. James’s. I then remembered that you wore a black crape round your arm, and that you looked pale and careworn. Further reflection also convinced me that, had you been really married, after the—the message you sent me by Hugh, you would not have been so anxious to attract my attention. But while I

remained with Lady Durnford I had no means of discovering the real state of the case; and it was not until I found myself quietly settled at Bramcote with Lady Chedworth, that I could watch my opportunity to introduce the subject. In this chance aided me; for a few days after my arrival, when I was reading the gossip of the *Morning Post* for her amusement during breakfast, I alighted on the announcement that Lord and Lady Bulstrode had taken up their residence for a few days at the Bedford Hotel, Brighton. "*By the bye,*" said I, in as careless a tone as I could assume, "*is not that Miss Grainger married?*" "*Married!*" exclaimed Lady Chedworth, "*quite the reverse. She has forsworn matrimony, and gone to be a nun.*" "*Surely you are mistaken,*" said I. "*Not at all,*" answered she; "*I saw a long account of the ceremony of her taking the white veil at Princethorpe, about a month ago, in the Morning Post. There was a grand display of Roman Catholic ceremonies on the occasion; and she was dressed quite like a bride, with all sorts of finery, for the last time. Poor Lady Bulstrode has been heart-broken about it. I fancy there was a disappointment in the case. I think the poor girl was attached to some one who*

could not be prevailed upon to marry her notwithstanding her immense fortune. By the bye, now I think of it," continued she, *"the obdurate knight in question, at least according to my conjecture, is an old admirer of yours—that Captain Osmanby. I know that his mother, poor dear Lady Osmanby, who is lately dead, and Lady Bulstrode had set their hearts upon a marriage between him and Miss Grainger, and I strongly suspect the resistance came from his side. They say she gave him every encouragement."* I must not ask you,' continued Mary, hesitatingly, 'how much truth there is in this part of the story.'

'I cannot deny,' said I, 'that Lady Chedworth was well-informed as to the wishes of my poor mother and Lady Bulstrode, and I admit that I was well aware of those wishes. You do not require to be told that I did not, nor *why* I did not, fall into their views. What chance I might have had of finding favour in Miss Grainger's eyes, had my own feelings been different, I do not pretend to say. I have told you that she was fully in my confidence.'

'Perhaps,' said Mary, 'you were not so fully in hers. There is no use in seeking to

disguise the fact, Gerald, that you have sacrificed this large fortune for my sake.'

'How can you speak of sacrifice, in such a case, Mary? For your love I would willingly have given up everything short of my soul and my honour. But it is now that I am called upon for a real sacrifice; and Heaven knows how I feel its bitterness. I must not forget that I came here pledged to submit to it. Thanks, a thousand thanks for this explanation, which has given me the only comfort my wretchedness admits of—the certainty that I am blameless in your eyes, and that, whatever befalls me, you will not think of me with a feeling of displeasure.'

There was a pause, during which Mary wept in silence, as I held her hand; and—hard as I struggled to prevent it—she did not weep alone.

'Gerald,' said she, at length, 'you reminded me just now of the last words you spoke to Hugh, which he faithfully reported to me. Am I to understand that you have come here to retract them?'

'Retract them, Mary! Never!'

'What, then, is the sacrifice to which you are pledged, as you tell me?'

‘I have promised that I will not *now* urge my suit against the grounds which may fairly entitle you to condemn it as hopeless.’

‘You have not forfeited that pledge, Gerald. Its obligation implies that I retain the views I once expressed. Is it not so?’

‘Of course it is, Mary.’

‘But, Gerald, the words I then wrote—under a sense of mortification, I must own it—do not speak my present sentiments.’

‘O Mary! do not trifle with my unhappiness. What am I to understand from this?’

‘That I have sufficiently tested the depth of my own feelings and the constancy of yours. Fortune is adverse for the moment. But we have hope to cheer us. We must wait, as many have had to do before us. But, strong in the assurance of your unchanging affection, I shall not be disheartened. I do not say that I will marry you without my father’s consent. But this I *do* say, that my heart is yours, and, come what may, I will marry no one else. Here is my hand upon it.’

O joy! I clasped her, unresisting, to my heart; and at that moment Lady Chedworth reentered the room.

‘What is this?’ exclaimed she, gravely and severely. ‘Captain Osmanby, where is your solemn promise?’

‘Dear Lady Chedworth,’ said Mary, less abashed than myself, ‘Captain Osmanby *has* kept his word; and he will now take his leave, with the full certainty that I will keep mine. Adieu, Gerald,’ continued she. ‘Happier days are in store for us. In the meantime, let “Hope and Trust” be our motto.’

So saying, she again extended her hand to me. I took it in silence, pressing it fervently to my lips; and in a tumult of emotion, such as I should in vain attempt to describe, I bowed my adieus to Lady Chedworth, and hurried out of the house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WORLD *VERSUS* THE CLOISTER.

How wonderful the change which one short hour had produced in my feelings! I had knocked at Lady Chedworth's door in a wretched state of despondency. I left the house with an unspeakable sense of happiness—a buoyancy of spirit that disdained all calm reasoning, and set the frowns of adverse fortune at defiance. Like Tam o' Shanter, I was

O'er all the ills of life victorious ;

and, however vague the hopes with which Mary's words had inspired me, I felt as if it would be a kind of sacrilege to doubt their full and speedy accomplishment.

It would certainly have puzzled me to tell from what point of the compass I expected the arrival of the *deus ex machinâ*, or the fairy godmother who was to effect the desired and sudden change in the aspect of my affairs.

But the 'good time coming' was not the less a certainty in the sanguine calculations of my heart. I disdained to admit my *head* into any share of the discussion.

The reader who has been apprised of the sober realities of my position, and can judge how far they were from encouraging such brilliant views of the future, will naturally conclude that this excited state of feeling was attended by its usual penalty of a reaction; and I must admit that my extraordinary elation was not altogether proof against the disenchanting influences of Chatham and the *dépôt* of the ——th Regiment, whither I was fain to betake myself but a few days after my parting interview with Mary. But although my spirits fluctuated a good deal, and sometimes flagged deplorably, when I thought of my approaching departure from England, I felt that there was enough, in the remembrance of her emphatic and loving words, to sustain me in courage and hope under the prospect of even greater trials.

Nor was there wanting a ray of light from another quarter to cheer the gloom of my horizon, ere I sailed for Jamaica.

My brother and Lady Osmanby arrived

unexpectedly from Corfu, about ten days before I left England; and, contrary to the predictions of his medical friends, who had, at his earnest entreaty, but not without great hesitation, sanctioned his removal, the voyage had been attended with very beneficial results to his bodily and mental condition.

He was, however, so weak in frame and emaciated in appearance, that I was much shocked on first seeing him after his arrival; and it was quite evident that he was in no state for the discussion of any business which was not mere matter of routine.

In the few and brief interviews with him to which I was necessarily restricted, through the caution of his physician, and by reason of the small amount of time at my own disposal, he showed a great anxiety to ascertain the exact position of my affairs. But I evaded his questions to the best of my ability, and resolutely abstained from entering into any details on the subject.

He already knew that I had left the Guards, and was about to join my new regiment in the West Indies: as I had written to Joséphine, announcing my intentions, during the progress of the arrangements connected with my ex-

change into the Line; and she had communicated to him so much of the purport of my letter, the general contents of which were, according to the understanding between her and me, to be carefully withheld from him, in the existing state of his health. In so doing, she had naturally refrained from assigning, on my behalf, the true reason of a step which might well have been suggested by a laudable desire to see a little more of active service than, in those piping times of peace, seemed likely to fall to the share of the Guards. He had expressed at the time neither surprise nor disapproval on being informed of the resolution I had come to. But this she, in part, attributed to the apathetic state of his spirits, still affected, in some degree, by the alarming torpor of his faculties, already noticed as having resulted from his accident, and from which he was but slowly rallying. But although George had made no further allusion to the subject in conversation with her, previous to their departure from Corfu, or during their homeyard voyage, Joséphine had little doubt that his knowledge of my plans, and his anxiety concerning my interests, had supplied

the principal motive of his sudden resolve to return at once to England.

To Joséphine herself, my reverse of fortune was a theme of unaffected lamentation ; and, if her entreaties could have prevailed, I should, even at the eleventh hour, have abandoned the idea of joining the —th, and sold out of the army, in the full confidence that George, of whose speedy restoration to health she felt assured, would, as she said, ‘make it all right,’ by religiously carrying into effect my father’s intentions in my favour.

But, in the midst of all her sympathy, she could not refrain from alluding with regret to the ‘unaccountable manner’ in which I had thrown away my chances of wealth and happiness, by not securing the hand of ‘poor Cissy Grainger ;’ gently hinting, at the same time, that it was not too late for me to reconsider the question.

‘Surely,’ said I, with a laugh, ‘you would not have me defraud the Church of so decided a vocation, even if I could make up my mind to elope with a nun, which is decidedly against my principles, and would, as I have always been taught to believe, bring an orthodox Catholic into a good amount of spiritual

trouble in this world, to say nothing of the next.'

'For shame, Gerald!' said she. 'How can you speak of anything so shocking as carrying off a professed nun? But poor Cissy, as you well know, is not a nun, and never will be one now.'

'Indeed!' said I. 'What is to prevent her?'

'What! don't you know?' said Lady Osmanby. 'Have you not heard that she has left Princethorpe?'

'I have not heard anything of the kind, and don't believe a word of it. You must certainly be mistaken. It is only about a fortnight since I was told, on excellent authority, of her having taken the white veil in presence of half the county of York, and being as happy as the day is long.'

'It is, nevertheless, quite true that she has left Princethorpe, and gone back to her mamma. I cannot be mistaken in the matter. I heard from Lady Bulstrode yesterday.'

'If it be so,' said I, 'I am well pleased to hear it. Cecilia Grainger is a very amiable and clever girl, and I wish her every happi-

ness. I have no doubt she will get a good husband.'

'Ah!' sighed Joséphine, 'how I wish you would make up your mind to accomplish your own prediction!'

'Dear Joséphine,' said I, 'the time is past for jesting on such a subject. My heart is in other keeping; and no one knows that better than Cecilia herself. You look amazed. But when you see her, as I suppose you will, she will confirm what I tell you. In the meantime, I should like to know the secret of this sudden change of plans on her part.'

'There is no secret in the matter. The discipline has always been too severe for her constitution, never very robust. But she contrived to keep up her enthusiasm pretty well during the year of her noviciate, and determined on completing the first solemn act of her probationary course, by being "clothed," as it is termed; or, as some people call it, taking the white veil. She went through the ceremony with a great deal of firmness, and every appearance of a cheerful frame of mind. But after the excitement of the moment had passed away, there was a visible and rapid change in her health and spirits. Her bodily

strength and her nervous system seemed to give way simultaneously. She struggled on for some time, from that false pride of consistency which makes people so averse to acknowledge themselves mistaken in their views or projects. At length she became seriously ill. In this state of things, both her spiritual and medical advisers concurred in suggesting to her that she was unfitted for life in the cloister. She yielded, after a decent show of reluctance, and a long conference with the Bishop, who plainly told her she had mistaken her vocation; and with his lordship's blessing, and the good wishes of the community, with whom she was a great favourite, and to whom she has since made a munificent present, she took leave of Princethorpe, and was removed, in a very weak state, to Leybourne Park, where she has been rapidly recovering both strength and spirits under Lady Bulstrode's care; and the last accounts report her as all but convalescent.'

'Well!' said I, 'I trust that, before long, you will be able to write me word of her approaching marriage to some very eligible *parti*. When George is sufficiently recovered to discuss family matters, you may ask him

why *I* can never be the man; and he has my free permission to tell you. But I daresay you know already.'

'No! he has faithfully kept your secret; if, as you hint, you have taken him into your confidence. I have always fancied he knew more about you than he thought proper to tell me; and, to say the truth, I have feared that there was something very wrong.'

'I suppose, my dear Joséphine, there is always something very wrong in preferring an angel to an heiress, and giving your heart away, when your friends think it your bounden duty to sell it to the highest bidder. But, right or wrong, the mischief is done in my case: and, now that my good friend Lady Bulstrode has found a cure for poor Cecilia's monastic fancies, without my agency, you may rely upon it that she is perfectly reconciled to the necessity of losing me as a son-in-law, and will henceforth, as she well may, look much higher for Cecilia in the matrimonial line. I hope you will follow her example, and come to the conclusion that all is for the best.'

CHAPTER XIX.

WHICH IS VERY NEAR BEING THE WIND-UP OF
MY HISTORY.

I SHALL not trouble the reader with many details concerning my military career in the West Indies, which was not destined to be of very long duration. I found the officers of the ——th a tolerably pleasant set of fellows, and the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel ——, not more of a martinet in matters of regimental *tenue* than a fat man of fifty-five, with an even temper and a good digestion, would naturally be in the grilling atmosphere that pervaded head-quarters at the time of my arrival at Kingston. The men of my company were rather painfully addicted to sangaree, and still more painfully addicted to breaking each other's heads, when under the influence of that seducing beverage—a state of things that can hardly excite the surprise of the reader, when he is informed that they were Tipperary boys to a man. As the rest of

our rank and file, with trifling exceptions, were also recruited from the Island of Saints, it may be fairly inferred that I was no worse off than my neighbours in the *matériel* of the force under my command.

I endeavoured, as far as possible, to temper justice with mercy in the limited range of exhortation, reprimand, and punishment properly appertaining to my regimental authority as Captain. Moreover, I did my best to set the example of strict sobriety, which was more than could be said of a good many of 'ours,' who, at mess, succumbed to the genius of Claret with a submission scarcely less abject than that exhibited by their inferiors to the demon of *Rum*. But Jamaica is a very thirsty climate, 'and that's the truth of it.'

I have still less to say of the aspect of social affairs in the colony, where the 'coming event' of 'abolition' cast its shadow before it, to the increased gloom of the landed interest, already sufficiently depressed by the sense of their normal insolvency. We had, however, no reason to complain of any lack of hospitality on the part of planters, agents, or mortgagees. Indeed, there was a good deal more than suited the tone of my spirits or the state of my health,

on the latter of which the climate began very early to tell with very sensible effect.

In the fourth month of my residence in the island I was attacked by yellow fever, from which I narrowly escaped with my life, after a desperate and unusually protracted struggle, that left me in a deplorable state of debility, in which I remained for many weeks without any perceptible change, wholly incapable of bodily or mental exertion of any kind, and with my nervous system sunk to the lowest state of depression.

When I at length began to rally, my progress towards convalescence was so very slow, and subject to so many fluctuations, partaking more or less of the character of a relapse, that there seemed very little prospect of my being able to resume my military duties within any ascertainable period. At length the regimental surgeon and the head of the medical staff of the colony, after a long and no doubt very learned consultation, came to the conclusion that a temporary change of climate was absolutely essential to my recovery, and recommended a speedy return to England, intimating that, in my particular condition, the sea-voyage homewards was likely to be more

rapidly beneficial to my health, than any other remedial course that could be suggested.

I lost no time in acting on this advice. Armed with the proper medical certificate, I had no difficulty in obtaining six months' leave of absence; and, well assured in my own mind that I should have no occasion to trouble the Horse Guards for an extension of this indulgence—an assurance founded on the belief that I should not survive the voyage—I was carried on board the *Augusta* transport, and sailed, on my return to England, exactly nine months after the day of my landing at Port Royal. During more than one-half of this period, I had been wholly unfit for regimental duty, so that I fear—as far as my military career in the —th is concerned—I am in some danger of being classed in the official category of 'the King's hard bargains!'

As I am myself recording the events of this veracious history more than a quarter of a century later than the date to which this part of my narrative refers, it must be pretty clear to the reader that I did not verify my gloomy misgivings by dying on my homeward voyage; although a stiffish gale, which caught us when

half way across the Atlantic, bid fair at one time to accomplish my mental prophesy, in a manner that had not entered into my calculations, when I took so unfavourable a view of my chances of longevity. The storm in question, which was about the ugliest I have ever had the fortune to encounter, appeared to be, in more senses than one, the crisis of my fate; for though, during the early period of the voyage, when the weather was tolerably fair, I had gained some slight accession of strength, and, as I crawled up and down the quarter deck, with the aid of my servant and a hand-crutch, was occasionally complimented on the improvement in my looks, by the good-nature of my fellow-passengers, yet, singularly enough, my rapid progress towards convalescence dates from the commencement of the gale.

As the probability of a speedy transition to the next world, through the agency of external causes, forced itself on my notice, in the fearful war of the elements and the significant anxiety visible in the countenance of the oldest and most resolute 'hands' on board, I began to be conscious of greatly-increased powers of resistance to the internal attacks of the grisly King. I suddenly discovered that the apathetic state in

which I had felt or fancied myself to be sunk, and which I had mistaken for indifference to life, was far less genuine than I had imagined, and that the prospect of going to the bottom was as repugnant to my mental as to my physical instincts.

The critical period was fortunately not of very long duration. The gale, after sweeping over us with fearful violence during five or six hours, not without considerable damage to spars and rigging, suddenly abated, leaving us all, in general, very thankful to Providence, and myself, in particular, much stronger on my legs than I had been since my attack of fever, and with a feeling of returning appetite amounting almost to voracity.

From that moment, I began to recover my strength with wonderful rapidity, and my health continued to improve daily, I might almost say hourly, during the remainder of the voyage, which was one of unusual duration. Although still a good deal of the scarecrow in appearance, I had little of the feeling of an invalid about me when I landed at Liverpool, and took my place in the mail for London.

I was, in fact, at that time, suffering far more from anxiety of mind than from bodily illness.

From various causes, I had been, during my residence in Jamaica, very scantily supplied with news of my friends at home; and, above all, I was wholly without information on the point where I was most anxious to obtain intelligence. No letter in which the name of Mary Conyers was so much as mentioned had reached my hands during the entire period of my absence from England. I had, indeed, hardly expected to hear directly from herself. But I had taken it for granted that she would have found some means of letting me know that I was not forgotten. How this was to be effected, I could not very clearly explain to myself. Her brother, who would have formed the most obvious channel of communication, was, I had reason to believe, still in India; and, unless Lady Chedworth's good offices could have been resorted to for the purpose, — a state of things hardly consistent with the theory of her functions as chaperon—it did not, on reflection, appear to me that Mary, without writing herself, had at her disposal any available means of conveying to me a word of remembrance, sympathy, or encouragement, or even the bare announcement of her well-being; of which, in my full reliance on the

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steadiness of her affection, I was chiefly desirous to be assured.

I had, on this account, often regretted that in my parting interview with Lady Osmanby, of which I have recorded some particulars in the preceding chapter, I had been restrained, by a slight feeling of annoyance at her persevering advocacy of Miss Grainger's claims on my attention, from taking the fair Joséphine into my entire confidence, and thereby acquiring a right to resort to her, during my residence abroad, for information respecting Mary, which she could have been at no loss to obtain. I had received two letters from her after my arrival at Kingston : one, written at my earnest request, and addressed to me at the head-quarters of my regiment, within a few weeks after my departure from England, containing a report of George's progress, which appeared to be very slow, and announcing their removal to Osmanby, where, after some demur on the part of his London physicians, it had been decided that he might safely take up his abode for the present ; the other, in answer to a letter from me, and reporting no material improvement in George's health in the interval. This last despatch of Joséphine's had remained

unacknowledged, in consequence of my attack of yellow fever, and the state of utter incapacity by which it had been succeeded.

Before I was taken ill, I had received a letter from Conyers, forwarded to me from London, and dated from Barrackpore. It was of course written in total ignorance of the disastrous change in my affairs, and expressed great satisfaction on finding that there was no truth in the report of my marriage with Miss Grainger, a point on which my letter, written subsequently to the one that had miscarried, could not fail to satisfy him. He also acquainted me with a fact that seemed to supply the explanation of Sir Robert's conduct in sending his daughter back to England from the Cape, instead of allowing her to accompany him to India; a proceeding which had struck me as rather ungracious, however satisfactory it might be to myself in its practical results. It appeared that the gallant general—*gallant* in both senses of the word, and whether the reader elects to treat it prosodically, as a trochee or an iambic—had, on his arrival at head-quarters, surprised and not a little disgusted Hugh by the announcement that he was about to be married to a youthful widow, the

relict of the deceased commanding officer of one of the Indian regiments included in his division—since whose death she had, on various pretexts, prolonged her residence at the station where he had been carried off by the cholera, for a much longer period than the settlement of his household affairs could have required, if the appointment of a successor, in his domestic capacity, had not, at a very early period of her widowhood, afforded her a subject of interesting occupation. Hugh had been formally presented to his future mamma; and candour, he said, obliged him to admit that, on making her acquaintance, he was conscious of a reprehensible wish that the ancient and venerable practice of *suttee* had been sanctioned and enforced by general orders throughout the Indian army. He added, that in the event of Sir Robert returning to England with ‘his begum of a bride’—which he would probably do within a few months, as he had now held his appointment for nearly the full period usually allotted to the duration of a divisional command—the idea was not to be tolerated for a moment, that Mary could take up her abode under the same roof with a woman who had been the talk of the cantonment in her former husband’s

lifetime, and whose appearance and manners were in strict conformity with her reported antecedents. Hugh concluded by saying that his own health was suffering much from the climate, and that, as the resignation or supersession of Sir Robert would involve the loss of his own staff appointment, he thought he should endeavour, although at the risk of losing a regimental step or two, to exchange into some corps returning to Europe, rather than join the head-quarters of his own regiment, which happened to be at one of the most unhealthy stations in the Presidency.

Had my prospects remained such as Hugh supposed them to be at the date of his letter, its receipt would have had a cheering effect upon my spirits, as I could easily collect, from the tone of his observations on his father's approaching marriage, and its influence on Mary's domestic arrangements, that he did not now anticipate any formidable opposition to my wishes on the part of the general, who would probably be well pleased to avoid any conflict of interest between his wife and his daughter, by transferring the care and custody of the latter to a husband in moderately prosperous circumstances. Unfortunately, the

unexpected collapse of my social, or at least my financial position, precluded me for the moment from this encouraging view of the question.

The contents of Hugh's letter comprised the only news of any special interest that had reached me during my West Indian exile. On arriving in London, therefore, I was in a state of very uncomfortable ignorance as to the well-being and whereabouts of all those whom I loved best in the world.

CHAPTER XX.

STARTLING NEWS.

My first care, on entering the coffee-room at Hatchett's at a very late hour in the morning after my arrival, was to consult the 'Court Guide' for the town residence of my brother. It was, however, the 'Boyle' of the preceding year, and therefore did not contain his address, as he had given up his house in Harley Street on going abroad. My father's name figured, of course, in the same edition, as the occupant of the old house in Portman Square. I thought it just possible, however, that George might have purchased the lease and furniture from the executors, or under the decree in the Chancery suit, and I determined, therefore, to make my first enquiries there. Accordingly, after despatching a hasty breakfast, I hailed a cab, and desired to be driven to Portman Square. The driver took his route through Curzon Street, and as we passed the house of my Aunt Tarleton

—whom, I think, I have already mentioned as inhabiting that classic locality—I was startled to observe a huge and freshly-painted hatchment (or *achievement*, if the reader is purist enough to insist upon that orthography) above the windows of the first floor.

The widow's lozenge, displaying in full blazon Tarleton and Wykeham, *quarterly*, impaling Osmanby and Fitzherbert, *ditto*, surmounted by the coronet of a viscount, and supported on either side by a black cat breathing flames (technically, I believe, a *cat-a-mountain*), which had often struck me as a happily characteristic incident of my good aunt's heraldic cognizance, left me in no doubt that the poor lady had closed her earthly career.

Unfortunately, the footing on which we had always been together was not, as the reader is aware, such as to render her loss a matter of very deep concern to me, though I was conscious of some regret, not quite distinguishable from self-reproach, that I had not taken more pains to overcome her prejudices and conciliate her regard. But, apart from this feeling, which had no *arrière pensée* connected with her ladyship's succession, the fact of her

death was of interest to me chiefly as it might affect the fortunes of my sister, who had always been looked upon in the family as the person to inherit whatever property Lady Tarleton could dispose of by will.

This train of ideas passed through my mind with the incalculable rapidity of thought suddenly diverted into a fresh channel; and as, at the moment when the hatchment attracted my attention, I did not fail also to observe that the house bore every appearance of being in the present occupation of a living proprietor or tenant, who could, I thought, be no other than one of my own family or connexions, I stopped the driver, jumped out of the cab, and knocked at the door.

The summons was promptly obeyed, and as the janitor revealed himself in the person of a rather dirty-looking livery servant in his shirt-sleeves, and with a green apron partially concealing the splendours of a gold-laced waistcoat, somewhat the worse for wear, a familiar voice in a melodious brogue, which I at once identified as belonging to Tim Casey, the under-butler at Shanbanagher, greeted me with the exclamation of joyous surprise.

‘Sure, it’s the Cap’n himself! Glory be to God, sir. Faix, and it’s her Ladyship and my Lard that’ll be glad to see ye this blessed day!’

‘Is my sister in London, Tim?’ enquired I.

‘She is, sir; in that room beyant. Sure we’ll all in London since th’ ould lady died.’

So saying, and leading the way as he spoke, he ushered me into a back room on the ground floor, and in a moment I found myself clasped in the arms of my sister Maud, while a whole tribe of youthful Mac Mahons, suspending their fierce onslaught on the roast leg of mutton, of which my sister had been superintending the demolition, crowded round me and clung to my skirts with a burst of vociferous joy that sufficiently evinced my popularity with the clan, and bore testimony to my character as a model uncle.

Maud disengaged me as quickly as she could from this impetuous attack of her household infantry, and, handing over the command to a very demure-looking French governess, hurried me upstairs to the drawing-room, where poor Belturbet, confined to the sofa by a smart fit of the gout, received me with his usual frank and joyous cordiality.

‘We have been in great anxiety about you,’

said Maud. ‘And I fear, dear Gerald, not without reason, for you are looking sadly. But how is it that you have been so long without writing?’

‘I have been kept in light marching order for the next world,’ said I, ‘and was expecting the route daily for some months before I left Jamaica; but, scarecrow as I look, I have distanced Yellow Jack, and am come home on sick leave. I also have been a long time without news, and am, consequently, very anxious. Pray tell me, how is George?’

‘Wonderfully recovered. He is at Osmanby, with Joséphine and the children.’

‘Then, thank God! I find you all flourishing.’

‘The devil you do!’ said Belturbet, who was painfully addicted to punning; ‘I deny it in *toe-toe*,’ gesticulating all the time with his game leg.

‘Never mind the gout,’ said I, ‘my dear Belturbet. It is the safety-valve of your constitution.’

‘It is a queer safety-valve that causes the machine to explode half-a-dozen times a-day! making a fellow, with the temper of an angel and the soul of a saint, break out into blas-

phemy that would shock the boatswain of a Yankee privateer.'

'Don't believe a word of it, Gerald,' said Maud; 'he is patience itself. But how did you hear of my poor Aunt's death?'

'I had *not* heard of it, and have been merely informed of it by the hatchment, as I passed by. I hope, and indeed I take it for granted, on finding you in possession here, that she has made you her chief legatee.'

'No; strange to say, she has died intestate. Her illness was very short, — inflammation of the lungs; and though Brisbane, her maid, wrote to me at Shanbanagher to express my aunt's wish to see me, and Belturbet and I started without delay, the poor soul was in a lethargic state when we arrived, and never recovered her consciousness. We made every search for a will, but none has been found; and Brisbane, who had been with her a great many years, and was much in her confidence, assures me, that although my aunt often spoke of what she intended to do with her property, and frequently talked of sending for her solicitor to make her arrangements, she never could make up her mind to do so.'

‘That was unfortunate,’ said I, ‘and, I think, very unfair to you. I suppose everything goes to George?’

‘Upon my word, Master Gerald!’ said Lord Belturbet, ‘you may be an excellent soldier, and a lady-killer of the very first class, as we know you are, but you’re a mighty bad lawyer!’

‘I never pretended to be *jurisperitus*,’ said I. ‘But what particular proof of my deficiencies am I giving you on the present occasion? I thought that George, as the eldest son of my aunt’s only brother, was probably her heir-at-law.’

‘And so he is, I dare say. But we have nothing to do with heirs-at-law here. Lady Tarleton had no landed property, and has left nothing but personal estate; which, as she died intestate, goes in equal shares to her next of kin. As she had, at her death, no relative nearer than her nephews and niece, and no niece or nephew but Lady Belturbet and her two brothers, I suppose you will not require to be told who are her next of kin?’

‘Why, you don’t mean to say,’ said I, as the truth suddenly flashed upon me, ‘that *I* come in for any portion of the property?’

‘One half of it is yours,’ said Maud. ‘The law gives us each a third; but George has nobly waived his rights in our favour, and insists on dividing his share between you and me. He has, in fact, already signed the necessary deeds or papers—I don’t know what you call them—to carry that purpose into effect.’

‘It is indeed most generous!’ said I, half bewildered by what I heard, and feeling that the room was beginning to turn round with me.

‘He says, and I entirely agree with him,’ said Maud, ‘that, as regards you, it is strict, though scanty justice. In my case, it is simply an act of generosity.’

‘And what,’ enquired I, with an increasing sense of faintness, ‘what is the value of the property left by my aunt?’

‘Maud can give you chapter and verse on that point,’ said Belturbet. ‘The letters of administration have been granted to her, and we have been busy with the lawyers for the last month. When all debts are paid, the residue, as they call it, to be divided between you, will be a trifle over fifty thousand pounds.’

I have no recollection of it, but I am told that, on hearing this, I fell on the floor as if I

had been shot. I do, however, remember, that after an interval of uncertain duration, which is a perfect blank in my memory, I found myself stretched at full length on a sofa, surrounded by a number of anxious faces, while Maud supported my head with her arm as she knelt on the ground beside me. My neck-handkerchief was off, my shirt-collar open; and I had the uncomfortable consciousness of having been deluged with cold water.

Should the reader be shocked at my want of firmness, under the announcement of an unexpected and favourable turn in the wheel of Fortune, he must bear in mind that I had but recently recovered from a severe and dangerous illness, and that my nerves were, for the time, proportionably weakened.

As my brother-in-law stated the amount of Lady Tarleton's property, the thought that the possession of 25,000*l.* would entitle me at once to claim the hand of Mary Conyers, and might enable me to remove all paternal objections, by a settlement of the money upon her, burst upon me with all the force of a sudden and joyous conviction, and with a kind of electricity that could not fail to play very serious pranks with

what the learned would describe as the arterial action of my enfeebled system.

In a very few minutes, and by the aid of a glass or two of port wine—a species of stimulant in which Belturbet had a strong hereditary faith—I was restored to a comfortable state of bodily and mental efficiency; and, in spite of the entreaties of my sister and brother-in-law, that I would keep quiet and avoid all fresh excitement for the remainder of the day, I took leave of them for the moment, promising to join them at dinner, re-entered my cab, and drove off—not to Portman Square, as I had originally intended, but whither the penetration of the sympathetic reader has, I dare say, already preceded me—viz., to Lady Chedworth's, in Lower Grosvenor Street.

It was the middle of March; and I was not very sanguine as to the probability of finding her in London at that early period of the season. The house, as I drove up, wore a half-inhabited look; and, in answer to my knock, the door was opened by a gouty old porter, whose unshaved condition and fustian jacket prepared me for the announcement that her ladyship was out of town.

I enquired if she was at Bramcote, which I knew to be her jointure-house.

‘No! her ladyship is at Brighton. She was in town last week; but she went down to Brighton yesterday with Miss Conyers and Mr. Wintringham. She won’t be in town until after Easter.’

‘Mr. Wintringham!’ said I, half inquiry, half exclamation.

‘Yes, sir. He has been staying on a visit with my lady.’

‘Humph! Can you give me their address at Brighton?’

‘My lady is at the Bedford Hotel for the present.’

‘Mr. Wintringham!’ thought I, as I regained the cab, my feelings of exultation slightly checked by the news of that gentleman’s domestication under the same roof with Mary and her chaperon; ‘what right has that fellow to be on a visit with Lady Chedworth? He, of all people, whom she seemed to hold in especial aversion? But what matter? I have Mary’s word, and I defy him!’

CHAPTER XXI.

IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS.

I DETERMINED on going down to Brighton with as little delay as possible. But as I could not, at the earliest, achieve this until the next day, it occurred to me that I might as well employ the present moment in 'looking up' old Scales, and making a few enquiries about my father's affairs, with the very faintest hope that they might prove to have turned out rather more favourably than was expected at the date of my departure for Jamaica.

To Lincoln's Inn I went accordingly; and, on sending in my name to Mr. Scales, I was promptly ushered into his private room, and received by the old gentleman himself, with a burst of cordial and exulting welcome that the most cynical of *attorneyphobists*, just arrived from the West Indies, could not but have considered cheap at *thirteen and fourpence*.

'My dear sir,' said he, 'this is indeed a

surprise — a most welcome surprise!—quite providential! I had no idea you were in England. It was but last week I wrote, and sent out to you, a long letter—indeed a most important statement, with a power of attorney for your signature, in reference to a very important matter.’

‘I suppose, Mr. Scales,’ said I, with a degree of cheerful resignation, the merit of which was due to my worthy aunt’s intestacy, ‘you wanted a power of attorney from me, to release me from the cares of landed property, and disencumber me, in due form, of my shadowy inheritance of Llandyddlwm.’

‘You are right and wrong at the same time,’ said Scales. ‘It was chiefly about Llandyddlwm I wrote; and supposing you agreed to the terms of sale, I was desirous of being empowered to carry the contract into effect on your behalf. But I am rejoiced to tell you that you are under no obligation to sell. The mortgagees are not desirous of calling in their money, as the estate is an ample security for the sums charged; and the interest is far higher than they can get in the funds.’

‘But I thought,’ said I, ‘that it was liable to my father’s debts, or some of them, and that

it would have to be sold in the Chancery suit, whether I liked it or not. I am sure you told me something to that effect.'

'I did; but I am happy to say Sir Philip's affairs have turned out much better than we expected—that there is enough to satisfy all his creditors in full, with the exception of these encumbrances, and to provide for the costs of suit, without resorting to the real estate. There will be a residue more than sufficient to reimburse you the two thousand pounds you paid in discharge of the bond to Mr. Blenkinsop.'

'That is so far satisfactory,' said I; 'but how has it come to pass?'

'We had, as it turns out, in estimating the property for the purposes of probate, very much under-rated the value of the personal effects in Portman Square and at Osmanby. But the great mistake was that, in taking the inventory at the latter place, we excluded from it some very valuable paintings which were intermixed with the old family pictures that we knew to have been put into the settlement with the rest of the heirlooms, on the occasion of Sir Philip's first marriage. The error was discovered on reference to the schedule annexed with the

settlement, and we afterwards traced the pictures in question as purchased by or bequeathed to Sir Philip himself, at different periods. There were, I think, but five of them in all:—A splendid Claude, a couple of Murillos, a portrait of King Charles the First by Van Dyck, and a magnificent half-length of a Monk, by Schiavone. They were all sold at Christie's, under the order of the Court, and fetched wonderful prices.'

'I remember the pictures,' said I, 'and particularly the two last. The Schiavone hung on the right side of the long gallery, and, as a boy, I used to call it "Old Snuffy." It always seemed to me rather antagonistic to the theory that cleanliness is next to godliness. I had no doubt that it was the portrait of a great saint; but I couldn't help thinking that, if he really looked like that, he must have been a very dirty one. Well, I am not sorry he was turned into hard cash. But I should have liked to keep poor King Charles, with all his faults.'

'Well,' said Scales, 'His Majesty is safe back at Osmanby, at all events. Of course, pictures of that class could not be sold unreservedly. The Master had fixed the reserved bidding at 1,000*l.*, the price at which the

picture had been appraised by Mr. Segulier. But Sir George employed an agent to bid at the sale; and it was ultimately knocked down to him at 1,200*l*.

‘Cheap at the money!’ cried I, laughing. ‘Do you call a paltry 1,200*l*. a fit sum for a king’s ransom? I thought you were a stauncher royalist, Mr. Scales. However, I am content.’

‘I should tell you,’ resumed Scales, ‘that we had made a similar mistake about some very valuable diamond and emerald ornaments of the late Lady Osmanby, which we at first supposed to be part of the scheduled Osmanby jewels, included in the settlement on the first marriage. So that, with one thing and another, the result is as I have told you.’

‘Well,’ said I, ‘my father’s debts are paid, thank God! and that is the main point. And now as to Llandyddlwm. I suppose you must do as you please about that; but as the rents are not more than sufficient to keep down the interest on the mortgages,—for so, I remember, you told me,—I have no object in retaining the property, and it strikes me that you had better sell at once, pay off the encumbrances, and have done with it.’

‘Oh! but, my dear sir!’ said Scales, rubbing his hands with every appearance of lively satisfaction, ‘that is your mistake, and that is what I was coming to. The matter has taken an unexpected and most providential turn. So far from Llandyddlwm being mortgaged to its full value, we have an offer to purchase it at more than four times the amount of the encumbrances.’

‘Wonders will never cease,’ cried I. ‘Do you mean to say that I shall be able to pocket the difference?’

‘Unquestionably, unless you prefer retaining the property. The estate is yours; subject only to the mortgage debts.’

‘But what has happened to it?’ inquired I. ‘Has some modern Amphion been whistling jigs to the stone-quarries—if there are any—and induced them to extemporise a handsome market-town on the estate, for my benefit?’

‘No; but the Blenoscwd Mining Company have got on the right scent as to the minerals under the surface, of which we have heard so much, and which, from the failure of the attempts in Sir Philip’s lifetime, we concluded to have no existence. In working close to the verge of their own land, where it adjoins

Llandyddlwm, they found several seams of coal and ironstone running directly under your property, in a south-easterly course, and, as they had reason to believe, extending to a great distance. It turns out, from the evidence of their chief engineer—with whom they have had a misunderstanding—and from that of a number of their workmen, who have corroborated his statement, that the company have been very quietly working these minerals under your property, for their own benefit, during the last two years, and to as great a lateral extent as it was possible for them to carry their encroachments, without the convenience of a shaft sunk from the surface of Llandyddlwm. On discovering this, I filed a bill in your name, on the strength of the general authority I had to act for you in the affairs of this property; and without going into details, it will suffice to say that our evidence of the encroachment was conclusive, and we obtained an injunction with very little delay. This drove the company into a corner and a compromise, which latter must be subject to your approval. They have agreed to pay a sum of 5,000*l.* by way of compensation for the coal &c. won during their surrepti-

tious working, in addition, of course, to the costs of the suit; and within the last fortnight they have made an offer to purchase the entire estate for 90,000*l.*, or, if you should decline to sell, they are ready to take a lease of it, either at a fixed rent, or paying an ample royalty.'

'*Præter spem evenit*,' said I. 'My dear Mr. Scales, you are my guardian angel—my *deus ex machinâ*. Close with them at once! Talk not to me of rents or royalties! I have learnt the value of ready money, and appreciate the sweet simplicity of the 3*l.* per cent. Consols.'

'Well, but you must consider, my dear sir, that if the Blenoscwd Company, who are very sharp practitioners, and, as we have seen, don't stick at a trifle, have made up their minds to offer 90,000*l.* for this property, they probably have very good reasons, amounting to something like a moral certainty, for believing that it is worth a great deal more.'

'You think,' said I, 'that they may be like the illustrious Colonel Charters, who would have been willing to give 10,000*l.* for a good character, on the principle that it would enable him to cheat to the extent of 20,000*l.* It may be so. But I must leave the responsibility of their moral shortcomings to be borne,

as best it may, by their joint-stock company conscience. I am not disposed to undertake the risk or the worry of working these mines at my own expense. The 90,000*l.*, after paying off the mortgages, will leave a surplus fully adequate to my moderate wants and wishes. I suppose the transaction can be completed without much delay.'

'There would be none on our part; and I am assured that the company are prepared with the money. The title will have to be approved by counsel on their behalf. But that will be mere matter of form.'

'And fees, I presume,' said I.

'Matter of fees, to a certain extent, of course,' said Scales. 'But the costs of the investigation must be comparatively light. The title was before Duval—on the occasion of the second mortgage, some years back—and, on behalf of the mortgagee, Duval reported in its favour as a perfectly sound title; and Sir Philip's will is the only subsequent dealing with the property that will have to be noticed in the abstract.'

'Well then, my good friend, you have my full authority to clinch the matter as speedily as possible, and the satisfaction of thinking

that your news of to-day has reduced the specific gravity of my spirits to something very like *zero*.'

'It is but right that it should be so,' said Scales; 'for it was my fortune to increase their weight very fearfully on a former occasion, and no one can tell how painful a duty it was to me. But I have more to say that may not be unacceptable. Your brother, on whose restoration to health I must be allowed to offer my congratulations, is firmly bent on carrying into effect Sir Philip's intentions in your favour. I have Sir George's instructions to raise a sum of 25,000*l*. on mortgage of the ——shire property, for the purpose of discharging so much of the debt which Sir Philip, he says, morally incurred to you.'

'Not for worlds, Mr. Scales,' said I, 'would I trespass on his generosity in this way, even if Llandyddlwm had proved as barren an inheritance as I believed it to be. Had things remained as they were when I left England, I might perhaps have accepted this benefit, or a portion of it, from my brother's kindness and affection. But the circumstances of the case are completely altered. This arrangement must have been contemplated by him in ignorance

of the facts you have just stated to me, and without taking into consideration the possibility of recent occurrences which have perhaps not come to your knowledge. He has already done all, and more than all, I had a right to expect from him, in order to repair the injury which my father's embarrassments had been the means of inflicting on me.'

'If you allude to an accession of property to the family through Lady Tarleton's intestacy,' said Scales, 'I am quite aware of the fact, and all the circumstances connected with it. The deed of release and discharge to the administratrix, in respect of his share of the residuary estate, executed by Sir George for the benefit of the other next of kin, was prepared in this office. I have never heard exactly what was likely to be the amount of the residue; and therefore I could not tell how far you would be benefited on the occasion. But I know, from Sir George's own written statement to myself, that he intended this charge of 25,000*l.* for you, as an addition to your share under Lady Tarleton's intestacy. I must admit, however, that when he gave me instructions on the subject, intimating a wish that the transaction might be completed before you

heard anything of the matter, he did not know of the favourable change in your prospects with reference to the sale of Llandyddlwm. In fact, those instructions were given at a time when the matter was still open to some doubt, and I thought it unadvisable to bring it under his notice until it had been reduced to a certainty. I felt pretty sure, however, that you would take the view of the subject which you have so strongly expressed, and therefore I have delayed taking any active proceedings for the purpose of raising the money until I could place the whole affair before you.'

'Having now done so,' said I, 'and found your expectations fully realized, you can have no difficulty in letting the matter drop. I will undertake to settle it with my brother.'

I need hardly say that this very satisfactory interview with my model attorney added a fresh impulse to my determination of going down to Brighton on the following day for the purpose of acquainting Mary Conyers with my change of fortune, and, as I fondly hoped, the consequent removal of every obstacle to our marriage.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHICH WILL SPEAK FOR ITSELF.

BUSINESS at the Horse Guards and at Greenwood's obliged me to delay my journey until the afternoon of the next day. Consequently, I did not reach Brighton before seven o'clock in the evening. This involved the necessity of postponing until the following morning all operations connected with the object of my visit.

I took up my quarters at the Albion Hotel, where I sat down to a late dinner in a snug corner of the small dining-room; the only other occupants of the apartment being a couple of gentlemen who had been dining together at a table placed on the opposite side of the fire-place, and who were chatting over their claret in no confidential tones, so that I could not avoid hearing a good deal of what passed between them. With this I could have very readily dispensed, as their conversation

was by no means of more than average brilliancy; and I had secured as an accompaniment to my solitary repast the current number of the 'Quarterly Review,' which boasted an anti-ministerial article, of equal humour and ferocity, from the slashing pen of the Right Honourable John Wilson Croker.

But however unwilling I was to listen to the disjointed talk of what appeared to me two very recently-fledged dandies, my attention was soon involuntarily riveted on what they were saying, by the mention of more than one name in which I took an interest.

'By the by,' said one of these worthies, 'why were you not at the old Duchess's on Tuesday?'

'Best of all possible reasons—was n't asked. Was it good?'

'No—slow to a degree! All the best people have left; and I suppose old St. A—— was obliged to whip up most of the resident quizzes who vote themselves decent company. To be sure there was that tremendous heiress, Miss Grainger. She ain't much to look at; but they say she has twenty thousand a-year.'

'Well, if it's only half the money, it

would n't be a bad spec. Did you dance with her?'

'Not I! I'm not in the heiress line: and she was very closely besieged on all sides. But there's a fellow of the name of Wintringham—good-looking chap enough—who seemed to make all the running on Tuesday. He was close at her side all through the evening.'

'Wintringham! Oh! I know the man you mean. But he's booked in another direction.'

'How?'

'You know that pretty Miss Conyers—that old Lady Chedworth chaperons everywhere. Wintringham's going to be married to her.'

'Where did you hear that?'

'I've heard it from several quarters; there can't be a doubt of it. I met them to-day, near Kemp Town, walking together *tête-à-tête*, as lovingly as possible.'

'Well, that does look like it. Has she any tin?'

'I fancy not, to speak of. But he don't want it; he's deuced well off. Took the name of Wintringham for a fortune; I forget what he was called before. He'll be a peer too, they say, when a bachelor uncle, Lord Some-

thing-or-other—I can 't remember the name—thinks fit to die.'

'Oh! uncles of that sort live for ever, and sometimes fling one altogether, by marrying and having a son, when they're as old as Methusalem. That's the way my governor was served.'

'Too bad! There ought to be an Act of Parliament against it.'

And thereupon the conversation of these ingenuous youths took another direction, into which the reader will not expect me to follow them. It may be well imagined that the few sentences I have just reported were quite sufficient to spoil my dinner. I should perhaps have thought but little of the rumour itself, which, as far as the authority of the narrator was concerned, evidently depended on the merest hearsay, had it not been for the assertion that he had seen Mary and her odious cousin walking together in the style of affianced lovers. I felt quite convinced that—in the code of propriety recognised by Lady Chedworth, who was one of the old school—the mere fact of cousinship could not be held as authorising so public a display of familiar intimacy. Nor could I more easily understand how, if matters

remained *in statu quo*, Mary should be willing to allow such a conspicuous privilege to a rejected suitor, whether kinsman or not.

While ruminating rather uncomfortably on this point, I took up the 'Brighton Herald,' which the waiter had placed within my reach on the table; and as my eye wandered listlessly over its columns, my notice was suddenly attracted by the paragraph headed 'Fashionable Changes,' in which the first entry was as follows:—

'Dowager Countess of Chedworth, Miss Conyers, and Mr. Wintringham, from the Bedford Hotel, to No. — Marine Parade.'

It was therefore clear that Mr. Wintringham had not only accompanied them on their journey from London to Brighton, but was openly domiciliated with them under circumstances quite unintelligible, except on the assumption that he was Mary's acknowledged *fiancé*, or that, at the lowest, Lady Chedworth was not only countenancing his suit, but urging it sedulously on Mary's favourable consideration.

I could not for a moment believe it possible that Mary had so completely forgotten the pledge she had given me at our last interview

as to plight her faith to another, without some previous explanation addressed to myself. I could, therefore, only adopt that view of the subject which would represent her as the object of a kind of domestic persecution, to which, from being daily and hourly exposed to its influence, she might be in some danger of yielding.

As the French proverb tells us, '*Les absens ont tort.*' I had certainly refrained from addressing Mary by letter, since my departure from England, from a motive of scrupulous delicacy which I thought she could not fail to understand and appreciate. But who could tell whether my silence had not been artfully interpreted, by those about her, as a symptom of forgetfulness or neglect? What efforts might they not have made to work upon her pride, by suggesting this version of my conduct. Her former rejection of Wintringham had no doubt been productive of some estrangement between them; but it was clear that, at least, their ancient cousinly cordiality must have been fully re-established, or else Lady Chedworth would hardly have thought it consistent with either kindness or good breeding to force his society on Mary, by receiving him as a resident guest both in London and at Brighton.

I could, therefore, only hope that I was still in time to interfere effectually with the ultimate success of his renewed suit; and I had little doubt that, once admitted into Mary's presence, I could fully exculpate myself from any blame which she might be disposed to attach to me, and successfully appeal to those claims on her affection which she had spontaneously admitted, and I had assuredly done nothing to forfeit.

This was the only practical conclusion at which I could arrive, as the result of much vague conjecture, doubt, and perplexity, which worked my feverish brain, and disturbed my slumbers, during one of the most restless nights I have ever experienced.

Upon this view of the case I determined to act, by presenting myself at No. — Marine Parade at as early an hour on the following morning as the proprieties of conventional life at Brighton,—which I considered to be somewhat less rigid as to morning visits than in London,—would fairly admit it.

Accordingly, I knocked at Lady Chedworth's door about noon, and found on enquiry that she was confined to her room by a severe cold. I then asked if I could see Miss Conyers, and was informed that she was out walking with

Mr. Wintringham. This corroboration of my unknown friend's gossip of the previous evening was anything but cheering. But I resolved to await as calmly as I could the moment of explanation; and taking it for granted that Mary and her companion would return from their walk about luncheon time, I determined to make another attempt to find her at home between one and two o'clock. In the meantime I sauntered slowly and sadly towards the West Cliff, half-wishing, half-dreading to meet her under circumstances which might at once confirm my worst apprehensions.

I pursued my way, however, nearly as far as Hove, without seeing anything of Mary or Wintringham. But as I was retracing my steps towards the East Cliff, by the Esplanade walk in front of Regency Square, I was surprised to hear my name uttered by a lady walking briskly in the opposite direction, who stopped suddenly on recognising me, and whom, absorbed as I was in my own painful reflections, I had not observed as she approached. I looked up and found myself confronted by the portly figure and good-humoured face of my former would-be mother-in-law, Lady Bulstrode.

Her greeting was as cordial as possible, and while noticing the change in my looks in a manner more candid than complimentary, she showed a friendly interest in my health of which I was not disposed to doubt the sincerity. I was aware that several motives, apart from any consideration of my individual merits, had combined to recommend me to her as a suitable son-in-law. But they would have scarcely sufficed in themselves to secure her favour for the claim which I did *not* urge, had she not entertained a strong personal regard and esteem for me. I could not but feel that, in wishing to entrust to my keeping, for life, the happiness and welfare of her only child, she had paid me the highest compliment that a Christian mother has it in her power to confer; and I was grateful accordingly.

‘Oh, dear! you must indeed have been very ill!’ said she, as I laid the blame of my cadaverous aspect on my recent attack of yellow fever. ‘And I hope you will take great care of yourself until you have quite shaken off the effects of that dreadful complaint. Ah! if your poor dear mother had lived, I am sure she would never have heard of your going to that horrid climate. By the by,’ continued she—

‘you will not, I hope, be hurt by my alluding to it—but I was *so* grieved to hear that there was so little remaining of the large fortune which ought to have been carefully preserved for you.’

‘Never mind!’ said I. ‘My affairs, thank God, have turned out much better than was expected; and I shall do very well. But pray tell me, how is Miss Grainger? I was rejoiced to hear that she had finally decided against a monastic life.’

‘Oh! it was quite a mistaken fancy, and her health never could have borne the discipline. She was in a very precarious state for some months after she left Princethorpe, but I rejoice to say she is quite well now. She is out riding with Lord Bulstrode. She will be charmed to see you. Perhaps, if you have nothing better to do, you would come to us this evening. We are No. — Brunswick Square. We shall have only a very few friends. Indeed, there is hardly anyone of our own set here, now the Court has left. But you know I like my rubber; and we shall muster a few dowagers who bring younger and prettier people in their train. You know Lady Chedworth, I think?’

‘Certainly ; she is an old friend of mine.’

‘Well, she has promised to come, and bring that charming Miss Conyers who is staying with her. You have seen her, I suppose. But what am I thinking of ? Cissy told me the other day that Mary Conyers was an old ally of yours, and that you were intimate with her family.’

‘Some of them, at least,’ said I, ‘are the dearest friends I have in the world.’

‘Oh ! then, of course, you have heard all about Mr. Wintringham ?’

‘I—, I heard something of it last evening,’ said I, hardly able to articulate, and scarcely knowing what I said.

‘Is it not fortunate ?’ said Lady Bulstrode ; ‘and it has come to pass so opportunely. For Lady Chedworth tells me that Mary never could have gone to live with her father, who married a second wife — some horrid person whom he has picked up in India — and is daily expected in England with his odious bride. They say Mr. Wintringham’s fortune is at least seven thousand a year.’

‘So I have heard,’ said I.

‘He seems a most charming person,’ continued her ladyship ; ‘so kind and attentive to

Mary! Indeed it is quite pretty to see how fond they are of each other. I met them walking just now, and he tells me he has taken a house in Seamore Place for the season, subject to her approval. Poor Lady Chedworth is heart-broken at the thought of losing her. But they will be close to us, in Stanhope Street; and as Cissy, and she have sworn eternal friendship, I need not say that suits us very well. By the by, there is one thing you can probably tell me, and save me the trouble of consulting Burke or Debrett on the point. I hear Lord Greystoke is dying—has dropsy, or something equally serious. Is not Mr. Wintringham next heir to the title?’

‘I believe so,’ said I, with a struggle to appear unconcerned under the crushing blow that Lady Bulstrode had, all unconsciously, dealt to my peace of mind. ‘I know he is a nephew, and in the line of succession.’

‘I thought so,’ said she, as I made my parting bow, and hurried away. ‘Well, remember that we shall expect you to-night, as soon after ten as you like.’

I was at first stunned—half bewildered by what I had heard. But as I walked on at a rapid pace, endeavouring to collect my thoughts,

and decide on the course which it behoved me to pursue under such trying circumstances, an intolerable sense of wrong, a conviction that I had been cruelly and heartlessly sacrificed to feelings and motives of the most worldly character, took possession of my mind, and gradually worked me up to a state of uncontrollable excitement. I became almost reckless of appearances or consequences. Although the certainty of Mary's falsehood left me no pretext for seeking an interview which could not fail to be as painful to myself as it would be humiliating to her,—although I felt the utter impossibility of maintaining a decent calmness of demeanour, or refraining from the most cutting severity of reproach,—I was irresistibly impelled to force myself into her presence, even if he—the destroyer of all my earthly hopes—were there to witness my undignified agitation, and secretly triumph in my despair. What matter, if the result of such a meeting should be to embroil me with him in a personal quarrel! I was fully prepared for such a contingency, and should, I fear, have eagerly welcomed it in the excited state of my feelings. Come what might, I would see Mary within the next half hour.

With this resolve, I hailed a fly, and drove

again to Lady Chedworth's, making the driver urge his horse to the top of his speed. A servant stood at the door as I jumped out of the carriage.

'Is Miss Conyers returned?' enquired I.

'She is this moment come in, sir,' said the man.

'She has just gone into the drawing-room.'

'Is she alone?'

'There is no one with her but Mr. Wintringham.'

'Can I see her, then?'

'Yes, sir. What name?'

'Give her this card,' said I. He took it; and I followed him up stairs to the drawing-room door.

As he entered, I heard Mary's voice in laughing tones. Suddenly an exclamation—what was it?—Surprise?—Confusion?—*Could* it be joy?—burst from her lips.

I strode into the room. She rushed towards me, with her bright—her beaming look.

'Oh, Gerald!' exclaimed she. 'My own Gerald!' as she stretched out both hands to greet me: while at the same moment a man, who had been lying at full length on the sofa, sprang up, and threw his arms round me with a shout of joy. I turned, and found myself in the embrace of—Hugh Conyers!

‘Mary! Hugh!’ said I. ‘Oh! what is the meaning of this? Surely this dreadful rumour cannot be true?’

‘What rumour, dearest Gerald?’ said Mary. ‘How pale and ill you look! What—what has happened?’

‘I have been ill, Mary, and at the point of death. But I would rather have died than hear, and be forced to believe, what I have been told twice within the last twenty-four hours. Thank God! it cannot be.’

‘What?—for Heaven’s sake, Gerald!’ said Mary, in astonishment and alarm.

‘That—that you are about to be married to Cyril Wintringham.’

‘Cyril Wintringham!’ exclaimed Mary, in evident amazement. ‘Dear Gerald, you have been dreaming. It is incredible that anyone should have made such a statement to you. Poor Cyril! Is it possible that you have not heard about him?’

‘I have heard nothing but what I tell you. I am just arrived from Jamaica, and was but four-and-twenty hours in London. Hearing that you were at Brighton, I hastened down here to bring you what I fondly hoped would be glad tidings; and within an hour after my

arrival I heard this report, which I scouted as utterly unworthy of belief, until it was confirmed to me but half-an-hour since by your own friend, Lady Bulstrode.'

'Lady Bulstrode! Oh, Gerald! you are under the strangest delusion. Lady Bulstrode knows as well as I do that poor Cyril Winttingham has been in his grave these six months.

'Dead!' exclaimed I, while a load suddenly glided from off my heart, leaving behind it a feeling of buoyant and exulting thankfulness that found vent in the irrepressible, though, under the circumstances, rather unseemly words, 'Heaven be praised!'

'Well done, Gerald,' said Hugh, with an uncontrollable burst of laughter at my disedifying and involuntary frankness. 'I am afraid it would not be quite decorous for Mary and me to echo your pious ejaculation, or perhaps we might cry "Amen!"'

'Oh! Hugh!' said Mary, 'how can you make a jest of all this!'

'Well, Mary,' said Hugh, more gravely, 'it would be simply affectation in me to pretend that I am not grateful to Providence for unexpected and unthought-of prosperity, although

it has come to me through the death of a kinsman with whom I was on moderately cordial terms; for there was, after all, but little sympathy between poor Cyril and myself. But I think I trace the origin of Gerald's singular mystification, and can set his mind still more at ease. As you had not heard of Cyril's death,' continued he, turning to me, 'you cannot have been aware that I have undergone a social, or, at least, a *nominal* metamorphosis — that it is no longer Hugh Conyers, but Hugh Wintringham who addresses you.'

'What do you mean?'

'That on the death of poor Cyril, who has died a bachelor, I succeeded to the Wintringham estates under the entail created by my great uncle's will, and that the property was left to me on the condition that I should assume and use the name of Wintringham only, as Cyril had been obliged to do. I had quite forgotten, if I had ever heard, that there was such a chance for me; and on arriving from India, on sick furlough, hardly more than two months ago, I had as little idea of finding myself in possession of 8,000*l.* a year as I had of being Archbishop of Canter-

bury. Poor Cyril was accidentally shot by his own gamekeeper in the first week of partridge shooting, last September. My change of name by virtue of His Majesty's sign manual was gazetted about six weeks since.'

'Do you mean to say,' said I, 'that the Mr. Wintringham whose name has met me at every turn during the last eight-and-forty hours, when I have been endeavouring to obtain tidings of Mary, is no other than yourself?'

'Who else could it be, dear Gerald?' said Mary. 'I know no other person of the name, should there be any such in existence. That you may have been informed, both in Grosvenor Street and down here, that Mr. Wintringham was with us, I can well understand; that any one—least of all, Lady Bulstrode—can have told you that I was engaged to be married to him, is utterly inconceivable; that *you* could believe, on the strength of a vague rumour, or, indeed, on any authority but my own, that I was capable of forfeiting my pledge and my faith to you—is—is what I was not prepared to hear from your own lips—!' and so saying, Mary burst into tears.

'Dearest Mary!' said I, taking her unresist-

ing hand, 'forgive the folly, the delusion of a moment. If Lady Bulstrode did not actually say, in so many words, that you were going to be married to Mr. Wintringham, the language she used and the details into which she entered were so singularly corroborative of the report which I distinctly heard last night in the coffee-room of the Albion, from the mouth of an utter stranger, that, in my ignorance of your cousin's death, I could put no other interpretation on them. When I was told that Mr. Wintringham had taken a house in Seamore place, subject to your approbation,—that Lady Chedworth was inconsolable at the thought of losing you,—that the arrangement was quite providential, on account of Sir Robert's recent marriage, which would deprive you of a home with him,—how could I, who knew of no Wintringham but your old admirer, avoid falling into this absurd mistake?'

'Never mind, Mary,' said Hugh, 'forgive him this once,—if he'll promise to be a good boy, and never do it again.'

'I shall not give him the opportunity,' said Mary, smiling through her tears; 'but it is rather hard upon me, after the letter I wrote

to him but a fortnight ago, and which must have crossed him on the voyage.'

'Did you indeed write to me, dearest?' said I.

'To be sure she did,' said Hugh; 'and so did I, which was more than you deserved. You see, besides the luck of succeeding poor Cyril in this property, I have the farther luck of having it entirely at my own disposal; whereas he had it only for life, with remainder to his issue, if he had left any. Why this is so, I can't very well understand, and don't undertake to explain. My lawyer tells me that it is because Cyril was born before old uncle Wintringham died or made his will; and I did not make my appearance until two or three years after the old gentleman had taken his departure. However, all I know is that, by means of some legal *legerdemain*,—for which, I dare say, I shall have to pay a very pretty bill of costs,—I have been able to disentail the property, which places me in a position to provide for my little Mary here, which I have been trying to do, in a very moderate way.'

'Dear Hugh!' said Mary, 'he has behaved most generously—most nobly, to me, Gerald.'

‘There is no generosity in the matter,’ said Hugh. ‘But it has occurred to me, and Mary has not dissented from that view of the question, that with what you have of your own—the fifteen thousand pounds that I have charged on the estate, and am about to settle for her benefit, and an additional couple of hundred a year, which I can very well afford to allow her during my life—you two might contrive to make a matrimonial start together; and that there is consequently no necessity for an indefinite postponement of your marriage. This is about the substance—the pith and marrow, at least, of our united communications to you. Of course, although Mary is now of age, and, so far, her own mistress, we did not contemplate carrying this arrangement into effect without going through the form of requesting the General’s sanction to the marriage. But I have every reason to feel confident that, under present circumstances, it will not be withheld. We are expecting him in England, with his lovely bride, about the end of next month; and I will undertake to bring him to reason on the subject, if, as I do not anticipate, he should be adverse in the first instance.’

‘My dear Hugh,’ said I, ‘it will, I trust, be

as unnecessary to tax your filial influence as to trespass on your open-hearted liberality in this matter. Thank God, Mary will not, in marrying me, place herself in a position to justify Sir Robert's objections, so far as they rest on pecuniary grounds. *My* affairs, also, have taken a new turn, dearest Mary, since we last met. Instead of being the ruined man I then supposed, I now find myself in independent and prosperous,—I may almost say, affluent circumstances; with an income considerably larger than I should have enjoyed from the inheritance on which alone I reckoned, and of which I was so unexpectedly deprived.'

'This is, indeed, good news,' said Hugh. 'Is your luck, like mine, clogged with a transmogrifying condition? And if so, by what uncouth *alias* are we henceforth to describe you?'

'Fortunately,' said I, 'I can give Mary the assurance that, in making me the happiest of men, she will not have to exchange her aristocratic name for anything more objectionable than Osmanby. The improvement in my fortunes is attributable merely to my aunt, Lady Tarleton's, death and intestacy, and the

unexpected amount of the purchase-money of an estate left to me by my father, which I had been led to believe was mortgaged to its full value. The result, however, is that I shall be as rich as I desire to be, and well able to make such a settlement on my intended wife as will exempt you from the necessity of charging your estate in her favour.'

'That is my affair,' said Hugh, 'the thing is done: and you may hold yourself absolved from all personal obligation to me on the occasion. I have tied up the money so fast, that you won't be able to finger a sixpence of it, except so far as Mary may think proper, while you behave decently, to allow you a few shillings a week out of the income.'

'I will undertake,' said Mary, 'to keep him in kid gloves and *eau de Cologne*. That is all I can promise.'

'Nay, Mary,' said I, 'you shall keep me in chains that will endure to my dying day, and which I shall never desire to break.'

'The expense of that particular article of luxury,' observed Hugh, 'will, I suppose, have to be borne by both in equal shares. At all events, you must both make the best of the fetters.'

‘Now, Gerald,’ said Mary, ‘do not be imposed upon by this affectation of cynical bachelor talk. Hugh is by no means as *savage* as he pretends to be. He is approaching the crisis of his own fate; and he dares not deny it.’

‘Pooh, nonsense!’ said Hugh. ‘Sisters are always the veriest match-makers. One can’t speak half a dozen times to the same young lady, without being regularly booked, in their private *memoranda*, as a lost man.’

‘You see, however,’ said Mary, ‘that he blushes at the charge, and tries to evade it.’

It was true—he *did* blush! I began to think there was something in it.

‘Well,’ said I, ‘he does look rather guilty, I admit. Who is the intended victim?’

‘You may well ask, Gerald. What do you say to your old flame, Cecilia Grainger!’

‘Oh! Mary, you are jesting. It is too good to be true!’

‘What!’ said Hugh. ‘Do you mean to say that a scraggy girl, with a red nose and carrotty hair, whose singing is like sour lemonade, and produces that unpleasant cutaneous affection called goose-skin, is good enough for me?’

‘For shame, Hugh!’ said Mary. ‘You are

quite wicked, and very hypocritical besides, in saying such things of dear Cissy Grainger. You know you think her quite pretty. You said so the other day.'

'No, Mary; not quite that. I merely said I thought her infinitely more pleasing than many who are more strictly handsome. But though I don't plead guilty to having lost my heart to her, I have never applied such disparaging terms either to her appearance or to her musical powers. I was only retorting Gerald's own words on himself, and quoting his strongly expressed opinions on the subject of Miss Grainger, at a time when there was a league of matrons and spinsters to marry him to her, whether he would or not.'

'Hugh is quite right, dear Mary. I was very unjust and libellous, I admit. But in those days—and you know why—I was not in a state of mind to form a calm judgment on her merits. I am now perfectly ready to acknowledge that she is remarkably good-looking for an heiress of her high figure; and were she even as plain as, in my ungallant spite, I described her, there cannot be two opinions about her mind, heart, and temper. She is as good and true as she is clever and agreeable.'

‘All that may be very true,’ said Hugh; ‘but it by no means follows that I am to lose my heart to her, or that she would marry me if I were to ask her.’

‘It is tolerably clear, at all events,’ said Mary, ‘that you have no opposition to fear from Lady Bulstrode. If *you* have n’t made up your mind, she has long since made up her’s, to secure you.’

‘Lady Bulstrode,’ said I, ‘is a person of unquestionable good taste in the selection of a son-in-law. But a dreadful apprehension just crosses my mind. In the short conversation I had with her just now,—during which we were so strangely at cross-purposes,—I much fear I led her astray on a point of some importance to Hugh, and encouraged her in a delusion calculated to give an undue development to her bias in his favour.’

‘How so?’ inquired Hugh.

‘She asked me if Mr. Wintringham—meaning, as it appears, Hugh, and not Cyril—was next heir to the Greystoke peerage; and I, thinking of course that the inquiry related to your cousin, confirmed her impression on the subject.’

‘There is no harm done,’ said Hugh.

‘Poor Cyril’s death has cleared the ground for me in that quarter also. The Greystoke barony was created by writ of summons, and therefore descends to heirs-general. If poor uncle Greystoke should happen to die a bachelor, and I survive him, I must have the next innings.’

‘I am delighted to hear it,’ said I, ‘for Cecilia Grainger’s sake as well as for your own; and I think I may include the House of Lords in my congratulations, as, to say the least of it, the morals of that august assembly will not suffer much by the change.’

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

HERE, for the present at least, I close the volume of my reminiscences.

Of all that the reader may feel desirous to know, on the subject of me or mine, little remains to be told save what his own powers of conjecture would supply.

A very few weeks sufficed to rid me of Llandyddlwm; and I need not say how gladly I exchanged the cares and responsibilities of territorial ownership, in the case of that mysterious estate, for the tranquil security of the three per cent. Consols, in which, after paying off the mortgages, the surplus of the purchase money, to an amount fully equal to what Mr. Scales had led me to expect, was invested without delay, in my name.

Notwithstanding the favourable turn thus unexpectedly given to my pecuniary affairs, my brother resolutely persisted in adhering to

the arrangement by which he had released his claim under my aunt Tarleton's intestacy, for the benefit of Lady Belturbet and myself. Nor was it without some difficulty that he could be persuaded to abandon his design of charging the Osmanby estates in my favour, in conformity to the instructions given to Mr. Scales during my absence from England, on which, as the reader is aware, that gentleman had judiciously refrained from acting without my sanction.

I had now no further obstacle to fear in my suit for the hand of Mary Conyers. Secure of her consent and Hugh's cordial approval, I could well have defied all opposition from other quarters. But I had none to apprehend. On Sir Robert's arrival from India, within a month of my return from Jamaica, he received the announcement of Mary's engagement with every mark of satisfaction, and expressed himself much pleased with the liberality of my views in the matter of settlements.

I may here state, *en passant*, that the formidable stepmother, from the contagion of whose society Hugh had been so anxious to guard his sister, proved to be far less objectionable, as a family connexion, than he had anticipated.

Whatever might have been her antecedents, as inconclusively vouched for by the gossip of a military cantonment, there was nothing in her appearance or demeanour to shock the fastidious or scandalize the demure; although slight traces of 'native' pedigree in the hue of her complexion, and the deep jet of her very fine eyes, afforded some excuse for Hugh's uncomplimentary description of her as a 'begum.'

As the empire was at peace, and the chances of good fighting, for a British soldier, in any part of the civilized world, seemed just then very remote, I had but small inducement, with such bright prospects of domestic happiness and pecuniary independence, to remain in the service. I accordingly found no difficulty in complying with Mary's request, and the wishes of my own family, by selling out of the army.

Hugh's altered circumstances had previously led to a similar result in his case, in spite of what was originally a far more decided vocation than my own, for the paths of glory. He had already taken this step on the strength of the Wintringham inheritance, whereby he had become a great landed proprietor, even before the death of Lord Greystoke, whose peerage, with a further and considerable accession of

fortune, devolved upon him a few weeks after my return to England, and thus supplied an additional motive for renouncing a career which, at that period, held out no great allurements to the spirit of military ambition.

My wedding was not long delayed after Sir Robert's formal sanction had been obtained to the engagement; and the sunshine of that auspicious day which inseparably linked together the fortunes of Mary Conyers and myself was unchecked by any cloud of regret or disapproval on the part of those who, next to herself, were nearest and dearest to me.

From the first moment when she was presented to my brother and Lady Osmanby as my affianced bride, the sweetness of her countenance, and the resistless charm of her manner, effectually prepared the way for that conquest of their hearts which she was destined to achieve with unconscious rapidity.

The knowledge of two important facts—viz. : first, that the state of my finances was now such as to relieve me from all necessity for heiress-hunting; and secondly, that the particular heiress who had been marked down by the assiduous sportsmanship of my family as my especial game, had 'got away' beyond my

reach, and was in a fair way of being 'bagged' by one whose heart, unlike mine, was eager in the chase—had, I daresay, its weight in removing prejudices that might otherwise have impeded so satisfactory a result.

It was even so. Mary's words were not spoken at random. Hugh had surrendered at discretion to the debateable charms and sterling virtues of Cecilia Grainger. How the antagonistic religious feelings on both sides were got over, I am unable to say. The struggle must, I think, have been severe on Hugh's part; as, in the abstract, he held strongly defined views on the subject of domestic orthodoxy. But nothing is so rare in life as to find a man whose practice in matters beyond the range of clear moral duty is always in perfect accordance with his theories: and the worst of it is, that when you *have* found him, he generally turns out to be a prig.

As to Cecilia's scruples, it is clear that their value must have been greatly overrated by maternal anxiety. But whatever their force, it was not proof against Hugh's line of reasoning, which I have no doubt was all the more cogent from the fact that he had had to begin by convincing himself.

Perhaps, in his secret heart, he cherished hopes of converting her to his own views. If so, it was decidedly a *faux calcul*. But I will say no more. All that need here be told of Lord and Lady Greystoke's married life is that, if their personal assurances can be relied on,—and I, for one, give them implicit credit,—neither party has had reason to repent of the bargain.

And now what shall I say on a point which, I trust, has a still deeper interest for the reader who has kindly accompanied me through the preceding pages—viz.: my own matrimonial career? Simply this,—that I heartily wish *his* impression of the conjugal tie—its comforts, its blessings, and its *graces*—I use the word advisedly—may be as satisfactory as my own, after a similar experience of wedded life, during more than a quarter of a century.

In these days of high-pressure controversy—when 'mixed marriages,' as they are technically termed, enjoy but a very limited popularity, from whatever dogmatic point of view they are considered—the divergence of belief existing between Mary and myself, at the date of our marriage, may possibly afford a ground of conjecture or speculation, as to its effect on

our respective views during the intervening period.

As to this, I shall content myself with stating that—like my gallant cavalier ancestor and namesake, Sir Gerald—I hold fast to that significant motto by which (as we have seen) he symbolized the steadfastness of his religious and dynastic principles. Like him, I, at least, remain *QUALIS AB INCEPTO*,—heartily repudiating, with him, the superseded maxim of ‘*CHASCUN POUR SOY* ;’ and I shall only add, in conclusion, that from the moment of our union down to the present time—when I still live in grateful enjoyment of the domestic sunshine it has cast over my daily existence—Mary and I have never had even the shadow of a quarrel about religion or anything else.

THE END.

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